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K I T T Y.

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real English book." ^{BY} P. 42

M. BETHAM EDWARDS,

AUTHOR OF

"DOCTOR JACOB,"
"A WINTER WITH THE SWALLOWS,"

&c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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K I T T Y.

CHAPTER I.

SHOW DAY IN BOHEMIA.

IT was the day before sending in pictures to the Royal Academy. Carriage after carriage set down ladies dressed in velvet and silk at the doors of rich and happy artists, who listened to their pretty critics deferentially, though they were feeling a little bored and meditating, all the while, a seven days' trip abroad.

Outside this charmed circle—that is to say, outside the equatorial line dividing South Kensington from Bohemia, success from struggle, hair powder and truffles from maids-of-all-work and muddle—there was no less excitement going on: real R. A.'s looking in for two whole minutes, and criticising in a friendly lofty way;

buyers and dealers paying less hasty visits ; and an interchange of courtesies and encouragements among all the artists living in Bohemia. There were three persons in a dingy little studio in No. 3, Paradise Place, Fulham, whose excitement had reached its culminating point, and was now subsiding over a quiet enjoyment of cigars and a bottle of French wine. Nobody says that the ladies were smoking, though that liberty is allowed to all who inhabit the Bohemian elysium. The elder lady was florid, untidy, and ungrammatical of speech, clothing her thoughts much as she did her body, without any regard whatever to niceties ; she didn't see what parts of speech, pins and laces were good for, she would say ; and as little did she care whether decent society liked her to wear her shoes down at heel, and to say "you was," or no,—what was decent society to her ? As she sat opposite to her picture, a clever masculine subject of which she could well afford to be proud, she looked the very impersonation of happy artistic vagabondage. You could see, nevertheless, that she loved her picture as a mother loves her child ; that, despite the superficial vulgarity of

her manners, she had a soul, and craved colour and light, and beautiful shapes, as other people crave meat and drink and wherewithal to be clothed.

The younger lady was a slender, handsome, sulky-looking girl of about twenty-tree, not too tidy either, but if slatternliness is pardonable at all, it must be when the culprit has large eyes, a beautiful mouth and a skin like pearl. She sat opposite to the picture—which was her own portrait—though her eyes were turned away from it, and looked into the deepest depths of her wine-glass.

The third of the party was a young man, who sat on the table, his long legs hanging down, his arms crossed in an attitude of delicious idleness, his hair blown ecstatically about his brow. He was blonde, blue-eyed, and beautiful, terribly pale, and wanting in bone and muscle, but enthusiastic to the finger-tips, as you could see. Just now his pale cheeks were flushed with pleasure, for his three pictures—in a second studio higher up—had been praised by a member of the hanging committee; and praise in such quarters

is like good paper-money, sure to be endorsed farther on.

“Who first thought of the champagne?” asked the mistress of the house, gaily; “if it’s you, Perry, you are a capital fellow.”

“Kitty says nothing,” said Perry, looking at the girl’s downcast face with an expression of intense vexation. “Kitty, why are you so glum, when Polly and I are just beginning to grow rich and immortal?”

“Oh! never mind about being immortal, but do got rich,” said Kitty; “I should like you so much better if you were never dunned for money, and wore unexceptionable waistcoats. One doesn’t enjoy champagne half so much when drunk in this disreputable way. It should come as a matter of course, and without any worry.”

“My good Kitty, who is worrying, I should like to know? Why, we are as gay as larks!” said Mrs. Cornford.

Kitty finished her wine very slowly, pursed up her handsome lips much as if she had been taking physic, and then pushed away her glass with a gesture of impatience, and made answer:

“It’s nice to drink wine, and its kind of Perry

to give it us ; but you know he has to pay for it, and he's not a Rothschild."

" You shouldn't say such things to the man you're engaged to ; it's—well—it's not pretty. Now, if I were young, and Perry were making love to me, I shouldn't think it becoming to say a word if he gave me a velvet gown. I should just wear it, and look my best, to please him ; and if a time came when money was wanted and not forthcoming, I should say, ' Why, my dear, there's the velvet gown,'—and off it would go to the place round the corner !"

" Bravo, Polly !" cried Perry, clapping his hands ; then, catching a look of reproach from Kitty, he forbore, and added, " But you're right, Kitty, and if Polly and I were left to ourselves we should never get the handling of a ten-pound note."

Just then there was a double knock. Perry opened the door an inch, and caught hold of the little maid-of-all-work by the skirt : " If it is anyone for me," he whispered, " show 'em the pictures, and say I'm engaged."

" Oh, of course, it's little Laura !" Mrs. Cornford said, and hastily put the wine-bottle and

glasses out of sight. "Now, Perry, you run away, please. Kitty, do you think you could give the child a lesson for me? I must go into the city, to see about my frames."

Before Kitty could reply or Perry obey, Mrs. Cornford's pupil came in: a round-eyed, pink-cheeked school-girl, about sixteen, with a large portfolio under her arm, who stood in the doorway silent and blushing.

"Come in, my dear," said Mrs. Cornford; "it's only Mr. Neeve, the gentleman who has my drawing-room floor, you know. Miss Rogers has made you provokingly punctual to-day, as usual; schoolmistresses are so provoking; but if I give you a start, you will do very well with Miss Silver here to look over you, and I will make up for lost time next lesson. Show me what you've done. Whew! what a little brick you are to work! Now, by way of rewarding you with lollipops, you shall try that Indian jar with the red curtain behind it. Here are the colours she is to use, Kitty, and don't be over-nice about quantity. The jar must be warm, you know; whatever you do, you must keep it warm." She rubbed a dozen patches of colour

on the palette, made a pencil mark or two, dashed in a little red here, a little purple there, and then hurried away. In less than two minutes she returned munching a biscuit, and tying on her bonnet at the same time.

“Mind what I said to you just now, Kitty, and don’t be up to your old tricks, Laura, dabbing on cold greys and whites” (Kitty had hardly ever handled a paint-brush in her life). “Ta-ta, my dears; be good children, or, when I come home, you’ll be whipped, I’ll warrant you.”

For some minutes after she had gone there was a perfect silence. Kitty seemed to know so much about painting that her young pupil thought her infinitely more clever than Mrs. Cornford—ten times nicer, too! When she pleased Mrs. Cornford, that lady would lay a heavy but approving hand on her shoulder, crying, ‘Why, what a jolly little soul you are!’ and when she displeased her, it would be, ‘Lawks! goodness gracious me! brat, you have no more idea of painting than a toad with one ear!’

But Kitty called her *Darling*, and *Dear*, in a

protective, superior sort of way, especially fascinating to little girls of a sentimental turn, like Laura ; and Kitty praised her fair hair, and let her see without expressed praise that she admired her eyes, till the child felt alike bewildered and bewitched.

“I wish Mrs. Cornford had to go after her frames every lesson-day,” she said, surprised into a sudden fit of demonstrativeness.

“My darling, what would papa say ? You know Mrs. Cornford is an artist of repute, and I am—nobody.”

“Nobody !” cried Laura, deprecatingly ; “oh, Miss Silver !”

“Well, I’ve no money ; and I’m not married, and I don’t do anything clever ; which means that I am nobody in this world, little Laura.”

Laura painted away, somewhat sadly. Kitty continued, with sentiment :

“But tell me about yourself, dear. Mrs. Cornford says that you live in a beautiful place in the country. How I envy you the blue skies and green trees ! and I dare say you keep pony carriages and big dogs, and all sorts of delicious things.”

"The place isn't like what it once was," Laura answered. "Everything has gone to rack and ruin since mamma died."

"But have you no aunt or elder sister to look after you?"

"The boys are at school, and I am the eldest of the girls," Laura said; "and when we are at home we all do just as we like."

"Poor little thing! I wish I were your elder sister, to put everything straight and make you all happy; that is just what I should like to do, Laura"

"And I wish——"

In the middle of her sentence the young girl broke down and blushed.

"And you wish—what?" asked Kitty, sharply.

But Laura hesitated, and could not be brought to finish her sentence. Then Kitty tried what coaxing and cajoling would do: she put her arm round her waist, she kissed her, she pressed her hand. At last Laura confessed that she wished, oh! how she wished, she might invite Kitty down for the holidays; but papa so disliked having strangers in the house, that she feared even to mention it to him. Miss Silver

seized upon the idea as a cat plumps upon a mouse.

“It wouldn’t be half the treat for you to have me that it would for me to come,” she cried. Then falling into her old sentimental strain, she added : “Let us fancy I am going down into the country with you, Laura, dear ; we should play at croquet on a beautiful smooth lawn, and drive to see the hounds meet in a pony carriage, and listen to the nightingales in the woods, and walk across the fields to church in muslin frocks, as people do in novels. I should like it for once. I’ve always lived a London, poverty-stricken, struggling life, and it makes me feel a hundred years old, as ugly as Cinderella’s sister, and out of temper with everybody.”

“Papa goes away in the autumn,” Laura said, brightening suddenly ; “we do as we like then, Miss Silver. Will you come and see me—I mean, me and Regy, and Clevy, and little Prissy, and all ?”

Miss Silver’s handsome face clouded over with thought for an instant, then beamed with smiles. “You kind, thoughtful darling!” she cried ; “will I come ? of course I will ; and now tell

me about Regy, and Clevy, and little Prissy, and all."

Kitty listened to a heap of prattle about Regy, who went to Eton, and was one of the winners in the last boat-race; and Clevy, who went to Harrow, and minded nobody; and little Prissy, who was spoiled by every one, and wouldn't go to school; and Wattie, the baby, who was six years old, and could ride, and hunt, and do everything.

"And papa—what does he do?" asked Kitty.

"But you won't see papa."

"My darling," said Miss Silver, handling her mouse a little cavalierly, now that she was more certain of it, "there are a hundred and fifty things that may spoil this pretty little scheme we have been hatching up, so we may as well make it as impossible as we like."

Laura didn't quite understand what Miss Silver was driving at, and her face said so plainly.

"Why, you silly child," Kitty cried, "your papa might come home unexpectedly, and find me with you, or I might arrive just before he started; but if I never see him in the course of

my mortal life, I should like to know what the father of my little Laura is like."

"But it is so difficult for me to say what papa is like," Laura answered, leaning her head upon her hand, and painting away at random. "He reads a great deal, makes chemical experiments, takes long walks alone, and never has his beard cut."

"A lucid description!" Kitty said with good-natured satire. "Is that all?"

"You are laughing at me, I know," Laura said, humbly. "But really I know very little about papa. When we go home for the holidays, he travels, and whenever I have chanced to be at home for a quarter, on account of measles or hooping-cough, he has given me everything I wanted, and just seen me once or twice a-day. I think it rather bothers papa having so many children."

"Well it may," Kitty said without thinking.

"But we couldn't help being born. I don't think it ought to bother papa."

"It ought not, dear child, and I daresay it does not really; only men are such helpless creatures in domestic matters, that they always

make mountains of molehills. I've no doubt that you could manage the house ten times better, young as you are."

"Wattie kicks me if I try to manage him," poor Laura answered; "and Prissy goes and tells tales to nurse, and Regy and Clevy tease me. Nobody knows how I dread leaving school."

What with all this talking, the Indian jar remained very much as Mrs. Cornford had left it; and when the clock struck, Laura crimsoned with dismay.

"I must go, because we have a dancing-lesson this afternoon. Oh! what will Mrs. Cornford say?"

"Never fear! I'll take all the blame upon myself," Kitty said; and pupil and mistress parted, after an affectionate kiss. When the child had gone, Kitty still sat over the picture, brush in hand, and in this attitude Perry found her half an hour after.

The young man rushed in as if he had been a cannon-ball shot through the wall, and without any ado, seized Miss Silver by the hand, and forced her into a waltz.

"They're sold! they're sold, Kitty!" he said;

“big picture, little picture, pot-boilers and all ; and now I’ve got enough to pay my debts and buy a wedding-ring, and give a spread to all the fellows at the ‘Star and Garter.’ ”

When Kitty could release herself, she made him sit down beside her and listen to a little sermon.

“ You are very clever, Perry,” she said, “ and I am very fond of you, and we are to be married some day—that’s settled. But I want you to understand my view of married life, and when you do, you won’t vex me by talking like a baby, as you did just now. You have just got enough money to pay your debts, and to buy a wedding-ring, and give a spread, as you call it—which means, I suppose, that when you have cleared yourself, you will have twenty pounds in your pocket. Suppose we marry to-morrow——”

“ By Jove ! I should wish for nothing better,” cried Perry, trying to kiss her hand.

“ Be quiet, sir, and listen to me. We eat our feast at Richmond, and come back to live in this hole : I, with hardly a decent gown to my back ; you, with one coat off and one on, and

both out at elbows (I've mended them many a time,—so there's no denying the fact). For a little while it would be all very well. And I do not say that we should come to a cat and dog life at all, but I think we should be wretched ; you do not look into the future as I do, and see little clouds and big clouds and monstrous clouds rising out of the distance to break over our unfortunate heads. There would be dirt, debt, and dejection ; in time, ill-temper, and a hundred thousand ignoble little stinging troubles. I don't think you will ever make a great fortune"—Kitty said this rather sadly—"though you are a genius, my poor Perry ; but genius without good sense is like a gold coin you can't get change for. I have good sense and no genius, but I know you would never be guided by me." Here Perry tried to interrupt her, but she continued, "Now I will tell you my ideal of married life. Don't look alarmed. I don't crave anything extravagant. I only crave respectability. I want a little semi-detached house to ourselves in Kensington, and two or three neat maids, and a little plate, and a little wine-cellar well filled, and a new silk dress once

or twice a-year. Is that a dream of Utopia?"

"It's a dream of six hundred a-year," said Perry, his hands in his pockets, and his face very gloomy.

"Well, if a man hasn't stuff in him worth six hundred a year, he's not the person to suit me," said Miss Silver firmly; then, with an appearance of yielding a little, she added, "Perry, life is short; why not enjoy it?"

"That's just what I think. Hang it, Kitty, let's send care to the dogs, and marry to-morrow. I'm sure we shall be happy."

But Kitty stuck to the letter of her text, and he could not move her by a hair's breadth. It was impossible for two people to love each other and be happy upon less than six hundred a-year.

CHAPTER II.

THE JOYS AND SORROWS OF ARTISTIC BOHEMIA.

KITTY was, in truth, growing tired of Bohemia. She had been born in it and reared in it ; she had eaten 'its paper and drunk its ink' ; she had only at rare intervals overstepped its boundary-line ; but she no longer loved it. Those exceptional wanderings into the kingdom of gentility had not been without effect, and, like the ambitious child of a vagabond mother, she now turned upon the hands that had fed her and taught her to walk.

But to get out of Bohemia into the kingdom of gentility, was the difficult point. Here she was as welcome as the flowers in May to everybody's crust and everybody's chimney-corner ; she had a dozen lovers, a dozen adopted fathers and mothers, a dozen bosom friends. There, she knew that she would be a scapegoat

and a stranger, having to pay for bare board and bread and water by some labour of her hands. What knight would pay court to her ? What men and women would love her as their own child ? What ladies would condescend to become her friends in the country she thirsted for, as Christian for the Delectable Mountains ? Poor Kitty ! she looked into her glass, ready to smite her own portrait.

“ What good does it do one to be handsome here or anywhere if one is poor ? Amongst our people Polly Cornford is liked as well as I, and she is by no means beautiful. If I donned respectability, and went out as a governess, who would do me a good turn for having a face fit for a queen ? What a pity there isn’t a massacre of the Innocents in Bohemia once in a while—I mean of the girls—for then I should never have known what it is to be a woman and hate it ; ” and Kitty would sit down, biting a long curl of her dark hair viciously, and think.

She had no visible kith nor kin, but her genealogy was good, and shone quite splendidly when occasion required, that is to say, outside

Bohemia. Her family came in with the Conqueror, a position which no one feels able to dispute; one ancestor had fallen on Flodden Field, and that, too, would be an incontestable fact to most people. Her great-grandfather, Sir Hugh Silver, had been disinherited and exiled by an unjust father, and the family estates had passed into other hands, in default of male heirs. Was there any reason why there should not have been a Sir Hugh Silver, and why Sir Hugh Silver should not have been Kitty's great-grandfather, and why Sir Hugh Silver should not have been disinherited and exiled by an unjust father, and why the family estates had passed into other hands, in default of male heirs? None in the world; and if we do not sometimes blow our little trumpets, who will blow them for us? Kitty's genealogy was her ewe-lamb of a triumph, and she hugged it and kept it warm, and would not have forsaken it for worlds.

As in Bohemia Proper, that is to say, Gypsydom, one pays no taxes, so in Bohemia Moral one enjoys many unqualified exemptions. Propriety costs other things as well as money.

The respectable man has to pay for the defalcations of his kindred. If his brother forges a bill, he is not thought fit for decent society. If his father fails dishonourably, who will look upon him as a man to be trusted? The respectable woman pays fourfold for the sins of her blood. Who would not rather die than be the daughter of an unfaithful wife, or the wife of an unlucky man, or, worse still, the mother of a vicious son? Putting the secret shame out of the question, how sorely are the teeth of respectable people set on edge because their fathers have eaten sour grapes!

And how dearly do we pay for such crimes as a lean look, a shabby coat, an empty purse! If we have well-filled wine-cellars and butteries at home, we are teased to dine out every day; if we wear shining cloth and rustling silks, there is not a tailor or a milliner who would not rejoice to trust us; if we are supposed to be well off, what so easy as to borrow money? In Bohemia there is no injustice of this sort. If your friends fall into ill luck or evil ways, it is none the worse for you—a little the better, since kind deeds are showered upon

your head as if you were a bride. Show the hole in your coat, and some one will take off his own and clothe you in it. The last crust of bread will be brought out to you ; the last six-pence will be shared with you.

A man is always a brother ; a woman always a sister in Bohemia.

Kitty knew all this, and it gave her matter for serious thought. It did her no harm to be poor and friendless here ; but how would it be in the great respectable world beyond ? She pondered and pondered, and came to no conclusions. One moment she said to herself, " How dull it would be out there ; no merry supper parties ; no vagabond trips to Paris ; no *cafés chantant* ; no shrimp teas at Greenwich, but instead sermons twice every Sunday ;—how dull it would be !" Another moment and it was, " But I'm sure I'm not fond enough of Perry to live with him in Mrs. Cornford's two-pair back. Oh dear ! oh dear ! if Perry's brains or mine were only worth six hundred a-year !"

She had already tried various manœuvres to serve two masters, to obtain a footing in the land of respectability without forfeiting her usu-

fruct in Bohemia; but that would not do. She found disloyalty to be the only unpardonable sin amongst her people, and abandoned it, seeing that, as yet, no other people welcomed her. Happy mediums are unknown theories to your true Bohemians, which is but natural. Bohemia itself is the very creation and expression of extravagance, and by extravagance alone does her kingdom stand.

In this stage of her career it occurred to Kitty to make the acquaintance of Mrs. Cornford's pupils; but at present nothing had come of them. There was one handsome girl, a Miss Beckford, whose father was a rich hog's-bristle merchant, living at Wandsworth, of whom Miss Silver at one time entertained hopes. Julia Beckford was a fast young lady, and wanted to get into Bohemia fully as much as Kitty wanted to get out. The friendship of the two girls grew up like a mushroom.

Miss Julia met Kitty, Perry, and one of Perry's friends one evening, *sub rosa*, and went to one of the small theatres. Miss Julia confided to Kitty that she would elope with Perry's friend any moment. Kitty was invited to

Wandsworth, when all at once, no one could tell how it happened, Miss Julia was sent off to Brussels with a frigid aunt, and Bohemia knew her no more. There was another young lady of the poetic, phlegmatic kind, who adored Kitty at first sight, and showed her adoration in a hundred acceptable ways, giving her ribbons, gloves, chocolate, and knick-knacks.

This girl had not the faintest notion of what Bohemia meant, but she lived in a dull, methodistical atmosphere at home, and the little unconventionalities of Paradise Place delighted her. So simple was she, that Mrs. Cornford would correct her drawing,—cigarette in mouth,—and would allow Perry to come into the studio for anything he wanted, when, of course, the young man would stop for a little enthusiastic talk with the ladies, and would recite verses from Byron or Shelley, which he did excellently; or play an air of Schubert's on the piano, which he did better still. There is nothing so intoxicating as enthusiasm to a sensitive, incapable nature; and it was quite new to Fanny Robins to hear blue skies talked of instead of the bad doings and lost souls of servants;

happy shadows, and graceful lines, instead of puddings and bonnets ; and to find a joyful, inconsequent pantheism taking the place of hard words about a state of grace and future burning.

Fanny Robins would have been just the ally Kitty needed, but for one thing. She had no brains. Kitty would drop hints plain enough to lodge upon an intellect no broader than the blade of a sixpenny knife ; they slipped off Fanny's as if it had been a greased needle. Kitty would try plain, unvarnished truths with no better success.

For instance, she said one day, " You say that you love me, Fanny, and would like to make me happy. You can easily do that. You are an only child, and your parents are well off. Persuade them to let me live with you as your governess, companion, and friend. What more should I want than to be always with my darling ? "

And the next week, Fanny came looking utterly miserable. In a moment her childish story was sobbed out. " I asked mamma, and mamma said I was a little fool ; and oh, Kitty ! I can't live without you. "

All this Kitty heard very grimly, and, though

she accepted poor little Fanny's gewgaws, she took less trouble about her for the future. She even forgot to kiss her sometimes, when Fanny would go home and write sad little stanzas with the help of a rhyming dictionary. Seeing that two promising fish had slipped away from the bait, Kitty threw out more line, and watched patiently for a third, which proved to be Laura. Whilst Laura hovered round the hook, now coming near enough for a nibble, now plunging a yard or two back, things went on right merrily among Kitty's people. Mr. Perugino Neeve (thus named by his father, himself an artist, by way of happy presage), not prevailing upon Kitty to marry, spent his money instead. He did not pay his debts.

“Having waited so long, the people can wait a little longer,” he said; “and by George, it’s hard for a fellow to work hard for fifty pounds, and spend it upon butcher’s and baker’s bills; if I owed that money for works of art it would be quite another matter.”

Accordingly, he put off the butcher and baker with fair words, and laid out his money upon a very beautiful old carved oak cabinet for his

studio, a new dress for Kitty, and such items as gloves, whisky, and Sunday suppers to the ladies. Perry congratulated himself a great deal more upon the spending of his money than the earning of it. With him to spend a five-pound note, no matter how, was an achievement, and when it was spent he set himself soberly to earn some more, borrowing in the meantime where he could.

Kitty tried again and again to make him economical, sometimes using rather strong words.

“ You’re such a goose,” she would say, “ that I can’t respect you, Perry ; try ever so much, I can’t respect you. Only the other day you had the opportunity of clearing yourself, and becoming respectable. What did you do ? Whilst those horrid people kept dunning you, and your pockets were full of money, you must choose to buy cabinets and ivory carvings, that will neither feed us nor clothe us.”

“ You lecture me just like a wife, Kitty,” said poor Perry, humbly ; “ and if you were my wife I should mind you,—I should really.”

“ I don’t believe a word of it ; but if people

could be married as servants are hired,—for a month upon trial,—we could make the experiment."

"Kitty, that's being too hard upon me."

"I should not be hard upon you unless I were fond of you, and wished to see you all that you might be," Kitty answered, soothingly. "Dear boy, do listen to reason. Save a five-pound note, only one, and you will find saving money quite easy after that. You are the person in the world who cares most for me, and what can your caring for me avail whilst you are penniless?"

This speech was like a kindly pat on the shoulder, accompanied by a sharp blow on the cheek. Perry did not know how to take it.

"Don't be mercenary" he said.

"I am not mercenary; I only want you to do the best you can for yourself. People must either go backwards or forwards in life; and if you love me, you must go forward. I wish to be proud of my husband."

Perry was in raptures.

"There never was a girl like you, Kitty, and

I only wish I were an A.R.A., so that you could be proud of me."

"Well. Many an A.R.A. has had humbler beginning than you, I'll be bound ; but Rome was not built in a day, and I expect no impossibilities from you, to begin with."

"I think I shall be quite rich in a year's time," Perry said, very seriously, "and you will see that I have reckoned upon nothing improbable ; I have got, as you know, orders for two pictures,—one for twenty-five, another for forty pounds ; that makes sixty-five. I shall paint these pictures so well that I'm morally sure to have orders for companion subjects."

Kitty pulled him up sharply.

"Why are you sure ?" she said.

"Why ? well, I'm just as sure as I am of getting my dinner to-morrow."

"There is no moral certainty about that," Kitty added ; "but go on."

And Perry went on.

"Twice sixty-five pounds make a hundred and thirty, and that, you know, will be gained in little more than two months' time ; what I can do in June and July, I can do in August

and September; what I can do in August and September, I can do in October and November."

"That's enough by way of illustration," Kitty interposed; "don't go on for ever, like Sancho Panza counting the sheep."

"Reckon it which way you please, my income for the next twelve months can be neither more nor less than seven hundred and eighty pounds a year."

Seven hundred and eighty pounds a year! The very thought of this so elated Perry, that he took the liberty of kissing Miss Silver *ex improviso*.

Kitty resented this, and resented the speech that had occasioned it.

"What a big baby you are!" she said with impatience. "Seven hundred and eighty pounds a year!—what nonsense to talk in this strain. Show me the odd eighty in your hands like this," she added, taking from her pocket a handful of halfpence and closing her fingers tight over them, "and I shall begin to believe in the rest. But your wealth is so sadly imaginary, my poor Perry—so sadly, recklessly imaginary."

"Everybody's wealth is imaginary, if you

come to that," Perry answered, quite seriously. "If I were a bloated capitalist, my money would all be invested, and no investments are safe for a day; if I were a banker, my confidential clerk would be sure to turn out a Redpath; if I belonged to the upper ten thousand, and had the title of lord, and plenty of lands, they might be so mortgaged as to keep me as poor as a curate. Talk to me as you will, Kitty, the only real and dependable capital is the capital of brains."

"Are you sure that you've got guarantee shares in that stock?" Kitty asked, a little doubtfully.

"Kitty!"

"Don't look aggrieved without occasion; I know that you can paint well when you like, and that all the big-wigs look upon you as their Benjamin of brushes; but I doubt sometimes whether you possess your full share of down-right common sense; and common sense is the thing to live and be happy upon, though you great geniuses so despise it."

"The first shall be last and the last first," Perry said; "if the material things of the world are put before the intellectual, the whole being

becomes coarse and common. We don't despise eating and drinking, Kitty, but we think a beautiful bit of colour more necessary——”

Kitty jumped up and started off.

“Have it all your own way,” she said, laughing. “I don't quarrel with you for loving beautiful bits of colour better than eating and drinking; but my being, for one, is coarse and common, and it is necessary, under the circumstances considered, that you take that fact into consideration.”

“I should think it is necessary,” Perry said, with satisfaction; and as soon as Kitty had left the studio, he set to work at his “pot-boiler,” in right good earnest. He had painted zealously for an hour or two, and was lazily enjoying a novel and a cigar in an arm-chair, when he heard footsteps in the passage. In the twinkling of an eye, the novel and cigar were thrust aside, and the maulstick and palette were taken up.

“Come in, Kitty; give the devil his due!” Perry called out; but instead of Kitty, the door was opened a few inches wide, and in were thrown two pairs of Kitty's boots.

It was Perry's happy office to black Miss Silver's boots, which he did so well that you would have thought he had been brought up as a boots all his life. Kitty had a beautiful foot, small and perfectly shaped, and Perry handled her shabby shoes as if they had been golden sandals of Artemis. He wanted nothing better than to clean those worn-out little shoes all the days of his life—not at all able to understand Kitty's ambition. "I can't think how it is," he mused, "that not one woman out of twenty but is spoiled by prudence—not that Kitty is spoiled; she's a splendid creature, and an exception; but even her prudence has the upper hand of her affections. Why in the world shouldn't we marry, and send care to the devil at once?"

CHAPTER III.

HOW THE SUMMER PASSED.

IT was a very gay summer in Bohemia. By the end of July, Kitty's one gala frock, Perry's gift, had been worn so often that it was faded past recognition; Kitty's bonnet, Perry's gift too, baffled all her womanly cunning at restoration. Kitty's gloves, of course her gloves were always Perry's gifts, were no more. One cannot have one's cake and eat it, and Kitty had enjoyed Perry's cake to the utmost; but what was to be done now that every crumb of it was eaten? She had so thoroughly rated him about extravagance that she determined to accept no more of his gifts unless absolutely necessary. She knew Mrs. Cornford to be terribly short of money, and she had, moreover, saddled herself with three orphan nieces of late, so

that common humanity forbade any appeal in that quarter ; and as Mrs. Cornford was considered a sort of Burdett Coutts in the little circle, it may be imagined Kitty looked far and wide for help and despaired of it. There was one particular friend of hers, an old Polish refugee, named Petroffsky, who was a teacher of languages, and earned about fifty pounds a-year. Kitty thought of him. Papa Peter, as she called him, is always giving me cakes and sweetstuff: she reflected what harm would there be in telling him that I would rather have a yard or two of ribbon once a year than all the cakes in the world? Accordingly, the next time she went to take tea with Papa Peter, and mend his stockings for him whilst he played the flute, she said, “Papa Peter, you are not to give me any more gingerbread-nuts or sugar-plums, under pain of my everlasting displeasure.”

“Now, you do ask me a thing impossible,” Papa Peter said, blushing and looking more disconcerted than the occasion should seem to warrant; “not to give my beautiful Catherine *gâteaux* and *bonbons*! *va t'en, mauvais enfant* ;” and that very moment he took out of his pocket

a packet of cakes, and put it into her own. Kitty said, after a little while :

“I will tell you what you shall give me, Papa Peter—every year a little something or other to wear: only a yard of pink ribbon to tie up my bonnie brown hair is more useful than a ton-weight of toffee, much as I like it, you know.” And Kitty coaxed and cajoled him, and let out, little by little, the terrible state of her wardrobe. It set Petroffsky thinking. This handsome young girl was the only being left to love and to love him in the world, and all her gowns and shoes were worn out. It was hard that he should do nothing for her when she mended his clothes so nicely, and was so fond of hearing him play the flute. And so she did not care for the sweet-meats which he had earned by giving lessons in French to the pastrycook’s little daughter over the way! He felt greatly mortified, but he was a Pole, and had a soul above despair; so when Kitty was gone, he thought the matter over for half an hour, and came to a conclusion. He saw no reason why French lessons should not be exchanged for millinery, as they had hitherto been exchanged for cakes. Accordingly he wrote

out the following advertisement, and carried it that same evening to the *Chelsea Halfpenny Times* :—

“ To MILLINERS.—A distinguished foreign professor will give lessons in French and German in exchange for a bonnet and mantle. Address Professeur, care of Mrs. Chumps, greengrocer, Middle Row, Chelsea.”

And as luck would have it, a milliner’s apprentice at Hammersmith, fired with the desire of parlezvousing and obtaining a situation in Paris, answered Papa Peter’s advertisement. A very satisfactory arrangement was entered upon, by which Miss Sarah Ann Sykes agreed to furnish a fashionable bonnet in return for ten lessons ; but the girl was dull, and poor Petroffsky repented him of his bargain.

How many repetitions of “ *Quelle heure est-il ?* ” “ *Que faites-vous ?* ” “ *Où allez-vous ?* ” and such phrases had to be given before the strings of the bonnet could fairly be said to be earned ; and then there were Perrier’s first two fables and the verb TO BE to roll up and down like Sisyphus’ stone, to pay for the flowers and lace. Whenever a lesson came to an end Petroffsky would say, “ *Et mon chapeau, mademoiselle, ça doit être*

bien beau, n'est-ce pas? My bonnet, mees, is he fine, is he achieved?" bowing her out with a grand air.

The little girl was honest, but hard, and when the ten lessons came to an end, she declared that she had bargained ill for herself. She expected to have understood French as well as her instructor by the end of the tenth lesson, and she wrangled and haggled till the old Pole consented to give her five additional lessons. And the verb TO BE and Perrier's first two fables were rolled up-hill and down-hill for five weary hours more, as Miss Sykes said, "to find the cap and drops." Petroffsky no more knew what the cap and drops meant than if she had spoken Welsh; but when the bonnet came at last, he was delighted, and wanted to enter into negotiations for a mantle. Miss Sykes shook her head. "The ingredients were too expensive," she said; "she could furnish a winter bonnet or little things like neck ribbons and collars, but nothing else."

So little things were agreed upon and the lessons recommenced.

Petroffsky could not bring himself to wait till Kitty's day to visit him, but carried off his

treasure to Paradise Row at once. He found the little community in great confusion. Mrs. Cornford had turned her back drawing-room into a laundry, and was washing away with a sort of relish delightful to behold; the three nieces were picking to pieces a bit of crimson velvet costume; the kitchen door stood open, and disclosed Perry in his shirt sleeves making damson tarts.

Mrs. Cornford looked round at Petroffsky, smiling at his perplexity. "Tell him all about it, Tommie, Binnie, Mimi, one of you," she said. "I can't stop."

The elder girl had just begun an explanation in a high key, when Kitty came down, all flushed with pleasure and business, and asking a hundred questions at once, such as "Tommie, have you fetched the pins?" "Binnie, you said I might take your lace collar, didn't you?" "Mimi, have you washed my hair-brush?" The sight of Petroffsky seemed to bore her, and she was about to plead an excuse and run upstairs again, when he undid the tissue paper, and displayed the hardly-earned bonnet. In a moment Kitty had her hands clasped round his arm, and

was smiling up into his face as a woman smiles at her lover.

“ You old darling!—you good kind Papa Peter,” she said, and she would have kissed him if he had not been too shy to divine her willingness; “ how I love you for being so good to me! And it’s so lucky too. But you shall see how I look in it.”

New bonnets are events in Bohemia, and the news of it spread like wildfire through the place, bringing in Perry all over flour and damson juice, the Miss Bianchis, the young ladies next door, who were photographers, and a host of miscellaneous admirers. Kitty had to ‘walk to the door’ again and again before everybody’s curiosity was satisfied, and Petroffsky’s thin old face flushed with pride at the praise his gift received.

“ I can’t stop to talk to you now because I’m so busy,” Kitty said, hurrying away bonnet in hand, “ for I’m invited to stay with some grand people in the country, and go the day after to-morrow; but you must come to my farewell supper to-morrow at eight o’clock. Good-bye.”

With that she went upstairs. When she had found a safe place for her bonnet, which was

no easy matter, she took up a letter, and read it for the hundredth time. The letter was written in a schoolgirl's hand, and ran thus :

“ Shelley House, Hurst End, Kent,
“ August 30, 185—

“ MY DEAREST MISS SILVER,—I hope you are quite well, and papa hopes that you will come down to stay with me during this vacation. Regy hopes that you will ride the bay mare; and papa's compliments, and he will send Henry, our man, to the station to meet you, if you will let us know by what train you will come. Do, do come as soon as possible. I have been so miserable for fear lest papa would not let me invite you.

“ I am, darling Miss Silver,
“ Your devoted friend,
“ LAURA.”

This letter had made Kitty's attic a bright place. She laughed at the difficulties in the way, such as want of money, clothes, and the stereotyped manner of society, and resolved to go and conquer. She could neither talk, nor ride, nor

play croquet, as all well-educated young ladies do; she had no father to whom she could go for a ten-pound note to pay her travelling expenses; she had not even a box to pack her clothes in, always supposing the possession of clothes to carry. But wit is worth more than gold, and Kitty had wit of the right kind, bright, clear, and plentiful as the waters of a spring. The first point to settle was that of money. Kitty knew exactly what she could do out of Bohemia and what she could not, and she recognised travelling by third-class as one of the latter. She counted the cost of a first-class ticket to Tunbridge, of porters' fees, of a fly, supposing the carriage to fail her, of a little pocket-money at Shelley House, and she said to herself that she could not do all this without obtaining five pounds. In respectable society a young lady like Kitty Silver would find it very difficult to borrow five pounds; but every one lends and borrows in Bohemia, and nobody expects security.

Kitty was universally popular, and she borrowed the money easily—half a sovereign here, half a sovereign there, till her purse was plump.

The second point to settle was that of clothes. The whole female community possessed but one silk dress, and that dress Kitty determined to have. It belonged to Mrs. Cornford—that is to say, it belonged to Mrs. Cornford more than it did to anybody else, though there was not a lady of her acquaintance who had not either been married in it, been bridesmaid in it, danced in it, gone to christenings in it. It was a very Wandering Jew of dresses, for no one could remember its beginning, still less could anyone prognosticate its decay; since it possessed that happy quality of never looking the worse for wear.

One day Kitty put her arms round Mrs. Cornford fondly, and said she had a favour to ask of her—such a favour—it was so great that she lacked the courage to mention it! Mrs. Cornford laughed good-naturedly, and put her away.

“ You little artful thing,” she said, “ out with it. By the time you are fairly off to see these grand folks, I shan’t have a stocking left to my feet.”

Kitty looked down almost tearful with contrition.

"I really won't be such a selfish monster, Polly," she said; "I can't."

Then of course good-natured Mrs. Cornford got the truth out, and the dress was placed at Kitty's service to take to Shelly House.

The other things necessary for her outfit were got together—no matter how; and as every hour brought her departure nearer, Kitty's spirits rose. Well they might. Fate had commanded her to make bricks without straw, and had she not made them? With regard to the last point, namely, the stereotyped manner that makes the Shibboleth of society, she felt a little uneasiness still, but she determined to pass off as an exceptional young lady,—a serious, dreamy young lady,—with a soul above croquet,—an ingenuous, romantic young lady, who had been brought up out of the world, and knew little of its observances.

The farewell supper was a grand success, except in Kitty's eyes; for so wrapt was she in anticipation of the coming visit, that everything else bored her. But she looked very bright and handsome as she sat by Perry's side, and all the men were ready to shed tears at the thought of

losing her. Who else in their little circle could boast of half her wit, her beauty, and her bewitching insinuation of manner? The ladies, too, were unequivocally sorry, for Kitty was not a coquette; and, though she kept Perry in a fever of alternate happiness and despair, her cleverness and good looks had victimised no one else. Kitty, to tell the truth, seemed a little cold-hearted, where men were concerned, to warm-hearted women like Polly Cornford and the little photographers next door. They seemed to have formed themselves in a sort of Mutual Protection of Men Society, taking under motherly or daughterly care half a score of broken-down artists, authors, and musicians, to whom they lent money, and for whom they toiled and span, whilst Kitty's only protégé, Papa Peter, received little at her hands except affection. But she was a favourite, nevertheless. So Kitty's supper, which Mrs. Cornford and Perry had provided, was eaten, and Kitty's health was drunk with unmitigated relish.

As the supply of glass and crockery was short, the ladies were helped first, and the plates were turned on the reverse side for the

gentlemen, and the glasses divided in this way,—one each for the single, and one between the married,—while knives, forks, and spoons were drawn lots for after everybody had been helped. The last arrangement was provocative of much merriment, as the possessor of a fork was sure to have chosen a custard, and so on.

When the dishes were almost cleared, and the bottles of various shapes were almost emptied, Perry, Kitty, and the three orphan nieces slipped out of the way, no one being rude enough to comment upon the act. About a quarter of an hour later, there was a sound of tambourines, castanets, and flutes on the stairs; the door was thrown open, and a wonderful thing was seen.

First came Perry and Kitty robed as Antony and Cleopatra,—the former in tunic and helmet, the latter in a white robe and purple peplum,—both crowned with roses. Next came the three orphan nieces and the maid-of-all-work, dressed as Egyptian slaves; faces, necks, and arms painted a deep brown, their heads bound with linen, their tunics of white cotton painted with monstrous yellow and brown snakes: the fore-

most bore a huge dish, on which lay a roast peacock (it was a Cochin China fowl) with shining, outspread tail, the hindmost keeping up a lively noise with tambourine, castanets, and flute.

What followed is easy to imagine. The "Huzzas" and "Bravos" were heard to the other end of the street, and the applause did not end here.

There was a universal "Ave imperator," and a bending of the knee. All the men wanted to kiss Cleopatra's hand, all the ladies had a rose to offer Antony; and if it had not been for his concern about the so-called peacock getting cold, the mummary would have lasted for hours.

"If ever grace was said before peacock it ought to be said now," Perry said, "for thereby hangs a tale. Twice this unhappy bird has been painted—you will see its portrait on the walls of the Academy—once photographed, once it has served as model for a wood-carving, and once it has been lent out for a neighbour's supper, on express conditions that it was not to be eaten."

When nothing was left of the fowl but his bones and his tail, the party began to break up. Of what use to stay? Any other dish, however choice, would have been like gilding refined gold, and any other joke like painting the lily. Your true Bohemian is always an epicure, and Kitty's guests did not outstay their welcome, but went away as soon as her feast had been eaten, her wine drunk, and her hospitality honoured. As soon as the room was cleared, Perry began to praise the company. What capital things A. had said! What good songs B. had sung! How pretty C. had looked! How thoroughly D. had entered into the spirit of everything!

Kitty yawned.

"All your geese lay golden eggs, Perry," she said, "and such big ones, too! The people were nice enough, and the party was nice enough, but I don't think anything in the world is worth such unmitigated praise, excepting Polly Cornford, because she dresses up other poor birds in her fine feathers, and you, because you made me such a beautiful box to carry my clothes in to Shelley House."

“If you were only not going there.”

“Oh, Perry!”

“I didn’t mean to say anything that sounded selfish, Kitty. God knows that!—but you are so impressible, that I don’t feel sure you will come back the same Kitty you go away.”

“Kitty will come back a fine lady, that is what the stars tell me,” Mrs. Cornford said; “Kitty will never relish our vagabond life any more, and she won’t marry you, Perry, unless things alter strangely, mark my word!”

Kitty took up her candle to go to bed.

“Good night,” she said, holding a cheek to each; “I leave you to settle my affairs between you.”

But Perry followed her into the passage, and she saw at a glance that some real anxiety prompted the action.

“Kitty,” he whispered, eagerly, “you mean to come back to me, don’t you? You would never let anything or anybody come between us two?”

“Why do you doubt me? It makes me doubt myself,” she answered.

“Only wait a little,” he went on, breathless-

ly, "and I will do all that you wish. I have the capability to do it, and I will. Only wait a little, Kitty."

"And that is what I say to you—only wait a little," she said, smiling.

The smile reassured him, and he grew gay again.

"Good night, my Cleopatra," he said.

"Good night," she said.

Why did she not call him Antony?

CHAPTER IV.

THE NORMANS.

THERE was quite an excitement in Paradise Place next morning. All the world was occupied with Kitty's departure, from old Petroffsky down to the youngest toddlekins in the street. One was busy in bringing down her luggage; another was brushing her travelling-cloak; a third was running hither and thither to borrow a strap for her rug; a fourth was setting the last stitch in her travelling-dress. At eleven o'clock precisely, old Petroffsky fetched the cab, and at a quarter past eleven, Kitty tripped downstairs, airily attired, as befitted the season. Perry followed, looking somewhat dishevelled and disreputable, as usual, and the two drove off, all Bohemia waving its handker-

chiefs, kissing its hands, and weeping after them. The cab had fairly turned the street when a wild head peeped in at the window, and something rattled into Kitty's lap.

It was a coral necklace that Mrs. Cornford had thought of in the eleventh hour. "Run, Mimi," she cried, "and overtake the cab. Never mind saying anything; she'll know all about it." And Kitty put away the necklace, gratefully, thinking how ornamental it would be, and how much more useful to her than to Polly Cornford. She made her adieux almost tenderly to Perry, promised to write to him, asked to hear from him, and laughed away his reiterated apprehensions that she would change one iota before she returned. Perry loitered on the platform till the train moved off; and, returning to his studio, shut himself up with the intention of painting a dozen pictures before her return.

Kitty leaned back on her comfortable cushions, and, drawing long breaths of the pleasant air, thought it a good thing to be travelling to a wealthy country-house first-class, with a little money in her pocket and no cares in her heart. She smiled to herself as a child who anticipates

a holiday. "How nice it is to do as other people do!" she thought, and she drew down the curtain and fanned herself with quite a grand air. One would have sworn that she was some rich lady, having a train of servants in the second-class carriage.

When she alighted at Tunbridge, she ordered a porter to put her luggage into Dr. Norman's carriage, a little loftily, and swept up and down the platform like any other fashionable young lady. By-and-by, a tall, gentlemanly youth came up, whip in hand, looked at her, turned away, and looked again.

"Miss Silver?" he said, with a frank smile and a blush.

Kitty smiled most sweetly.

"I'm Regy," he said; and then they shook hands and were good friends. "Papa sent me because Henry was out, but I wished to come, of course," he went on. "Have you much plunder—I mean luggage—and will it all fit in the back-seat of the phaeton?" He pointed to the phaeton, a shabby turn-out, Kitty thought if everything else is so shabby, I need not have made such ado about my poor dress! and she

felt a little offended that they had not sent the family carriage for her. She smiled at Regy, nevertheless, and told him that she was afraid her plunder, as he called it, would not fit in the back-seat of the phaeton.

Then the boy helped her in, taking great care that her pretty skirts were not soiled on the wheels, and thinking all the while what a splendid looking creature Laura's friend was. They chatted as they drove through the narrow green lanes, fragrant with the smell of the ripening hop, Kitty quite surprised at her own feeling of youthfulness and ability to discuss unaccustomed subjects; for Regy described school-life, and "larks," and cricket-matches, and his own particular "chums," she listening and talking with interest.

"Miss Silver," the boy said, fired with an unusual ambition of gallantry, "there is to be a lawn-party at the Oakleys to-morrow, and I told Laura I wouldn't go, but if you will I will, and I'll drive you and Laura, and Clevy can sit behind."

Kitty said that she should much like to go to the lawn-party, but that she mustn't give him

more of her company than she gave Laura, or the little thing would be jealous.

“ Not she,” said Regy, with a decided crack of his whip, “ for her head will be full of Charley Dawson and Arthur Fanshawe;—a sly little puss is Miss Laura, and such a flirt when your head is turned! There’s Shelley House. Isn’t it a jolly old place?”

Again Kitty was doomed to disappointment. Shelley House was not the stately, well-kept mansion she had expected, but a large, rambling, old-fashioned manor-house, with a malting-house and granaries on one side, orchards and vegetable gardens on the other, a picturesque paddock in front, broken by clumps of fir-trees, and a background of beautiful beech-woods. What would have charmed anyone else was the delicious look of freedom about the place. Nothing seemed bound to keep in its place. There were roses popping up amid the cabbage-beds, raspberry bushes growing on the borders of the lawn, scarlet runners and vines running up the front of the house in company with clematis and westeria, and no apparent routine or rule anywhere; two impudent-looking young heifers had broken into

the paddock, and the tame old pony and little goat, on whose territory they had encroached, seemed to enjoy their company.

Hens were dragging their chicks across the gravelled carriage-way as if it was a proper thing to do, and a sagacious old cart-horse leaned his head over the farm-yard fence, and cropped the sweet green boughs belonging to the flower-garden, with an air that said, “How nice it is to be here—now nice it is!” Kitty was certainly disappointed. She had looked for a conventional country-house, with smooth-shaven lawns, well-kept conservatories, handsome bay-windows with lace curtains, a host of grooms and gardeners, keeping everything in order, and at the sound of carriage wheels, housemaids and footmen running to the door.

Instead of housemaids and footmen, all the children came running out to meet her—Laura glowing with pleasure; Clevy and Wattie shy, but curious; little Miss Prissy as anxious to form and declare her opinion of her sister’s guest as any of the others; Laura was at first the shyest of all.

“ You must come into the breakfast-room and

have something to eat," she said, and that was all she found to say. Regy was inclined to monopolise Miss Silver wholly, having made such a good beginning ; and, leading the pony to the grass till some one came to take it out, he accompanied the others in-doors. Then poor Kitty was literally assailed by these hospitable young savages, who wanted her to eat this thing and that thing, to come and sit here, to go and look there, to tell them so and so, to promise one this, another that, and so on. Laura sat on one side, her arm round her waist ; Prissy persisted in possessing her lap ; Wattie climbed to the back of her chair, and rocked it in a manner very pleasant during lunch-time ; Regy and Clevy were all but fighting for the privilege of helping her to wine or meat. This sort of thing lasted till Kitty's head ached and cheeks flushed with weariness. What should she do in order to rid herself of her good-natured tormentors ? She proposed to Laura that they two should go up to her room and unpack ; but the proposal was so jealously received by the boys that, out of regard for her own popularity, she gave it up.

Then she suggested a walk round the garden ; but Regy wanted to take her in one direction, Clevy in another, Wattie in a third ; and though their quarrelling was not rancorous, they persisted in disagreeing till Kitty gave up that idea too. She was racking her brains for some incontestable excuse, when the door opened. "Papa," Prissy cried, and Dr. Norman entered. This was the first time in Kitty's life that she had met a gentleman in the full acceptation of the word, and she started to her feet, colouring uneasily. The sudden blush, the involuntary movement and the momentary embarrassment, made her look girlish and graceful, and induced Dr. Norman to greet her less formally than he would otherwise have done. He came forward and shook her cordially by the hand, uttered one or two hospitable formularies rather absently, and then sat down to eat his lunch. "What have you got for me, Laura?" he said, surveying the remnants of the meal with quite a contented air ; "and, Regy, mind and bring up some of your best wine for Miss—Laura's visitor. I let these children manage the house," he said,

turning to Kitty with a smile ; “ it’s the easiest way.”

Laura pointed at the different dishes triumphantly. “ Miss Silver praised this,” she said, “ and this, and this—all of them *my* providings.”

“ Laura, I thought of the tarts,” Wattie said, “ and helped cook to make them ; you shouldn’t take the credit of everything.”

“ The tarts were very nice, Wattie,” said Kitty, patting the boy’s shoulder.

“ Miss Silver calls everything nice,” Wattie said ; “ and I say Miss Silver is nice, don’t you, papa ?”

“ Of course,” Dr. Norman made answer, still absently ; “ I wish you would order cook to bring up stale bread, Laura, dear ; you will all kill yourselves with indigestion if you go on in this way.”

“ I forget things so,” Laura said, colouring with vexation.

“ And, Regy, I don’t suppose you know it, my boy, but this claret is the very newest in the cellar, and quite unfit for human drinking ; if these terrible children poison you during your

stay, Miss Silver, I hope I shall not be indicted by your friends for murder."

"I told Regy he knew no more about wine than a new-born baby," said Master Clevy; "but he lights a big candle, and goes down the cellar looking as wise as King Solomon."

"If you don't behave yourself, Master Clevy!" Regy exclaimed authoritatively, "I shall cut you off your glass of port at dessert, and so I tell you!"

Clevy made a very impolite gesture of defiance, and began a new subject of discussion. Little Prissy looked from one to the other, contracting her little brows and pursing up her rosy lips. "Papa," she said, "shan't you and I be glad when they are all gone back to school?"

Kitty watched this little girl narrowly, and soon saw how matters stood. Prissy was her father's pet. He scolded her sometimes, and he never scolded his other children; but Kitty was clever enough to see that this exceptional harshness was on the surface only, perhaps meant to hide a real partiality. She was unlike her brothers and sister, less vivacious, less demonstrative, less artless in look and manner;

and she evidently adored her father, and expected a great deal of adoration in return. Whilst he was eating his uncomfortable meal, she kept by his side, and every plate and glass must pass through her hands.

To please Prissy he did all sorts of things distasteful to him—ate her comfits, fed her doll, “opened his mouth, shut his eyes, and saw what she should send him,” and when he had done, rose and returned to his study, having first bowed to Kitty with a distant air.

“I thought you said that Dr. Norman always travelled during the holidays?” Kitty asked of Laura.

“He is going off to Norway in a week’s time,” Laura answered; and her face said that she was glad.

“It’s very unkind of you to say papa is going, Laura,” Prissy broke in fiercely, “when you know that I shall be miserable whilst he is away. I shall say Miss Silver is going, for you love her better than papa.”

“Prissy!” Laura expostulated with tears in her eyes.

“Nobody loves papa but I,” Prissy went on,

“and nobody loves me but papa, and I shall ask him to take me to Norway.”

“Shouldn’t we all be miserable,” said Clevy pretending to cry. “Miss Silver wouldn’t be able to eat, I shouldn’t know how to console her, and we should all get skeletons by the time you got back.”

Miss Prissy seized her doll, and dashed out of the room at this. Kitty expostulated with the offender.

“Why do you tease the child so?” she said; “she’s but a baby, after all.”

“But she does take so much upon herself!” Clevy replied, a little repentant nevertheless. “Miss Silver, she tries to rule us all.”

“As if you were not able to take care of yourself, without taking refuge in that sort of thing?”

“What sort of thing?”

“Teasing and tormenting. I wish you would amuse me, and leave Prissy alone.”

Clevy was immensely flattered, and he wanted to begin amusing her at once. Would she like to go and see his rabbits, or his little pigs, or his boat?

To each Kitty made affirmative answers, but she could not go out yet, she said, as she wanted to write a letter.

"Then I'll go and see that all my things are in nice order," Clevy said, and went away.

When he was gone Regy left Kitty's side, and, taking up a book, threw himself into an arm-chair in the farther end of the room. Laura looked at Kitty, and smiled significantly. Kitty saw in a moment that she had made a mistake.

"What an interesting book that must be Regy is reading," she said, after a time.

Regy read on sulkily.

"We must find out the name of that book, Laura. We must put it away under lock and key when you and I have designs upon Regy's time. Oh, dear! I am sorry he is so fond of reading!"

Regy read on.

"You see," Kitty added very gravely, "I had reckoned upon you and Regy and I getting rid of the children sometimes, and enjoying ourselves quietly; but if he likes books better than our company, what shall we do?"

Regy's jealous fit was giving way. "I'm not fond of reading," he said, "but you asked Clevy to amuse you, Miss Silver, and I thought I wasn't wanted."

"You're only joking," Kitty said, "it's quite impossible you should mind what I say to a little fellow like Clevy!"

Regy looked quite an inch higher that moment, and Kitty felt sure of his allegiance for the future. But she had not yet secured Wattie and Prissy, and before the day was over, what with one vexation and another, wished herself fairly back in Paradise Place. Dr. Norman was courteous whenever he encountered her, which was seldom enough; and the fresh atmosphere of the place, its airiness, its liberty, its cheerful disorder, pleased her. But those terrible children! Poor Kitty could not sleep for thinking of all the sacrifices she must make to obtain popularity among them all. Laura's childish confidences, Wattie's rough affection, Prissy's caprices, Clevy's overwhelming good-nature, Regy's gallantry, equally bored her, and she saw no way of escape.

She seemed to have slept for an hour or two

only, when a loud rapping at the door awoke her.

"Do get up, Miss Silver," Regy said; "we've got out the boat, and are going for a row before breakfast—it's so nice!"

For the first time in her life, Kitty made her toilette at six o'clock in the morning; with what rueful longings and regrets for the undisturbed attic in Paradise Place, may be imagined!

CHAPTER V.

THE THIN EDGE OF THE WEDGE.

KITTY had come down to Shelley House determined to conquer all before her, and ere the first three days of her visit were over she had very fairly succeeded. Every one in the house adored her, except Dr. Norman, and with him she felt as much of a stranger as ever. She had tried various means to drive in "the thin edge of the wedge," as the phrase goes, to interest him, to make him understand her interest in him, to establish some sort of friendliness between them. But as yet she seemed very far from succeeding, and in four days more he was to start for Norway. In spite of his seeming good-nature, Kitty could but think him very unamiable. Having invited her to his house he ought, at least, to have seen that she was made

comfortable and amused. As it was, he left her entirely to the tender mercies of the children, merely playing the part of host by such catechisms as these :

“Regy, have you driven Miss Silver out to-day?” “Clevy, have you got the proper number of croquet-balls, so that you can all play together?” “Laura, I hope, whilst I am gone, you will invite the Fanshawes and the Dawsons, and make Miss Silver as gay as you can,”—and so on.

“Does Dr. Norman never go out with you?” Kitty asked Laura one day rather impatiently.

“He has not gone out nearly so much since mamma died,” the child said—“at least not to see our friends. He is very learned, you know, and knows So and so, and So and so,” here Laura enumerated half a score of scientific men, “and it isn’t likely he would care for our friends. It is very unfortunate for us that papa should be learned?”

“I suppose he still grieves very much for the loss of your mother?” Kitty said.

“Not so much as he did at first,” Laura answered, tenderly; “I think he tries to make the

house happy now—and we are very happy, aren't we?"

Kitty answered mechanically, and fell into deep thought. She could afford to think about Dr. Norman now, having no other subject of concern, and she did think about him in good earnest. He was a learned man, a gentleman, and a recluse; it puzzled her very much to handle such idiosyncrasies as these. She was clever, and had read a good deal, but not the sort of reading that would recommend itself to him; Kitty felt that she had better play the part of an ignoramus altogether. She was handsome, and passed off for being quite fashionable among a household so simple and unpretending as that of Shelley House; but Dr. Norman seemed to have no eyes, however she might 'trick out her dark hair with red ribbons, and sweep her long skirts across his path. She was solicitous of his comfort, handing him his slippers and newspaper quietly, and ministering to his comfort in almost unnoticeable ways; but it was all the same. Kitty would have despaired of making friends with Dr. Norman but for one fact. He was a man and she was a woman,

and a woman can always make herself necessary to a man, if she pleases. One day Kitty happened to be alone when Dr. Norman came in for his mid-day meal: he had his early cup of tea in his dressing-room, and breakfasted again after the children's lunch. She rose, not with alacrity, rather with a quiet, humble, sympathetic air, as if she were his waiting-maid, and helped him to wine and meat.

“Don't you trouble,” he said, as usual; but she insisted upon troubling; and, when she had got him all he wanted, took up her needlework, a doll's dress for Prissy, and said quietly, almost sadly,

“You should let me have the pleasure of doing such little things for you, since you have been so kind to me.”

“In what way have I been kind?” asked Dr. Norman. “I haven't the least idea.”

“It was very kind of you to ask me down here,” Kitty said, still modestly stitching away at her doll's frock. “I have not many friends, and seldom get asked into the country.”

“Then I hope you will come here as often as you like. It's a great pleasure to the children.”

“I do think they are fond of me; and even Prissy lets me do things for her now.”

“Oh! Prissy is always telling me of the wonderful things Miss Silver has done for her; but you really make yourself a slave to the children. It is nonsense to do that, and when I am away they will lead you a pretty life of it.”

“If I can only help to make their holidays happy, I don’t mind making myself a slave to them,” Kitty answered. “Supposing that I am not wanted at home, and you desire it, I will stay here till you return from Norway.”

“It is very good of you,” said Dr. Norman heartily; “but do you honestly think you can live in this Babel so long?”

“I don’t find it a Babel. I like being with children—when they are nice children—and, besides, Laura and Regy are quite companionable. If you would feel it any comfort to know that I am with them, I will stay till you are home again.”

Dr. Norman thought the proposition a very amiable one on Kitty’s part, and a very expedient one to accept.

“The children never take any harm with the servants to look after them,” he said; “but, of course, I would prefer to leave them in charge of a lady like yourself.”

Kitty grew radiant.

“I will put Laura’s wardrobe in proper order for her return to school, and make Regy and Clevy some new shirts,” she went on; “and we will all be good while you are away.”

“Do exactly as you like,” said Dr. Norman, rising from the table; “only be happy. All I ask of my children is to tell the truth and be happy.”

“And they are happy,” Kitty said, with emphasis.

“I hope so, poor things! but they sadly want a mother to look after them.”

And with this, Dr. Norman went away. He liked Kitty’s simple way of putting the matter of her stay; nothing, he thought, could be more kind or gentlewomanly. There was no doubt that the children wished it; Laura and Regy had thrown out hints more than once, and the younger ones had said at meal-time—“Papa, ask Miss Silver to stay on and on, and never

go ;" or, "Papa, Miss Silver is not to go away any more at all," and so on. It seemed to him the most sensible arrangement in the world ; and he felt greatly indebted to Kitty for suggesting it. Dr. Norman having children, loved them, and wished to make them happy ; but he was always pitying them for being motherless, and blaming himself for not being able to take a mother's care of them. For their own sakes he could have wished that they had never been born. If a mother's care was only a purchaseable thing, he would have purchased it at any price—except one. He could not marry again. He had lost a perfect wife—at least, he had so found her—and he could not marry again. A second marriage seemed to him like writing a parody on a psalm.

As Dr. Norman reviewed Kitty's proposal, he thought more and more of what his wife would have been to him now. Regy was as tall as himself. Laura had forsaken short frocks and dolls long ago ; in a few years his children would be young men and women, and he had not the faintest notion what to do with them. The boys must make their

way in the world, and do no dishonour to his name. The girls must stay with him a little longer, and then marry, and be lost to him too. But who was there to see that all this was well done? Dr. Norman's heart failed him as he thought of the future. It was easy to make the children's lives what they ought to be now, whilst they were like so many young animals, requiring plenty of pasture-ground and nothing more; but the time was drawing near when these wild young things must have harness put on them, to do their work in the world; and how would it be then? He was not a domestic man; he had never been adroit at holding a baby, or drawing a child's tooth, and he had not grown more domestic during these years of widowhood. He said to himself that other men would have fulfilled the paternal duty better than he had done, and would have made themselves more acquainted with the individual characters of their children, would have associated themselves more closely with them in little things. It was not in his character to do this. His theory about children began and ended in giving them plenty of breathing space. Having

children, he felt that he was in duty bound to have theories about them.

Dr. Norman had not a particle of sentimentality in his disposition ; he was a widower in spirit and in truth, but he did not dress up his grief, like a Madonna Dolorosa, with flowers and exotics, and worship it every day. He did not read all the new poems that crop up about love and grief. He despised above all etiquette, the etiquette of the feelings ; so that people called him stern, and believed him to be so. How should it be otherwise ?

But Dr. Norman went his way, content that the world should never see a scar which was not nearly healed yet.

During those last few days, before he started for his trip, his children saw a good deal of him.

“ Miss Silver shall not think me a sort of Timon,” he thought ; “ and as I am going away, the sacrifice will only be for a day or two. If I were to be at home all the holidays, it would be the death of me ! ”

So he joined the young people at croquet for ten minutes one day, accompanied them to church another, drove with them to see some

ruins on a third; letting himself be carried about like a tame bear, just where they liked.

It was amusing to see how the children took care of him. Laura made him put on his great-coat; Regy would not allow him to drive; Prissy told him where the grass was dry enough to sit down on, and where it was not. All this made Kitty impatient. She wanted to take care of Dr. Norman herself, and he always rebelled against her good offices, whilst he obeyed Prissy as if she had been his wife.

The drive to the ruins was surreptitiously turned by the children into a sort of picnic; and when Dr. Norman alighted he saw two or three young ladies in white frocks moving among the trees, and some of Clevy's friends boiling a kettle. He would have escaped, but saw no way, so he made a grimace, and swallowed the pill bravely.

Kitty walked up to him, looking very conscious.

"You mustn't scold," she said; "we so wanted to have a little fête before you went away, and we knew we must set a trap for you—Prissy said that."

“Oh! Prissy would cheat Mephistopheles himself! But I’m sorry that the party seems to be all of boys and girls. Regy and Laura ought to have invited some grown-up people for you.”

“It doesn’t matter,” Kitty said, with that frankness she had already found so acceptable; “I want to have a little talk with you about the children.”

“You are very good, I’m sure, to trouble yourself about the children,” Dr. Norman answered, taking out a cigar—Kitty had more than once begged him to smoke in her presence, and he knew he might do it now. “Suppose we stroll up the hill whilst they prepare their kettledrum?”

Kitty assented, and they set off.

“I was going to ask you about Laura’s wardrobe,” Kitty went on, very practically. “Symonds, the housekeeper, is far too old to see to it, and the poor child is quite disfigured by the old-fashioned dresses she has bought for her.”

“Get her anything she ought to have; I will leave Laura a cheque,” Dr. Norman answered,

anxious to settle the matter in as few words as possible.

“And what is far more important, Dr. Norman, I don’t feel at all sure that the school you send Laura to is good enough for her.”

“Oh, dear ! oh, dear !” Dr. Norman groaned. “What a thing it is to have motherless children! I assure you that same school was recommended to me by one of my oldest friends. The child declares herself to be very happy.”

“Yes, she is happy enough ; but that is not all. I think she has not air enough, nor exercise enough, nor good food enough, for a fast-growing girl.”

Dr. Norman took longer steps, and looked uneasy.

“She shall not go to school again. She shall keep at home for once and for all, and shall do nothing but eat and run about,” he said, evidently scolding himself bitterly. “I never notice children’s looks ; but I ought to have had her weighed when she went and when she came home. Make her take port wine, Miss Silver.”

“Never fear but that Laura does well enough at home,” Kitty said, smiling.

“But what to do with her at home? The child mustn’t grow up a savage. She can’t go to the Sunday School.”

“Oh! Dr. Norman, there is plenty of time to think about that. A little holiday, more or less, won’t do any harm; and, after all, what so important as health?”

“You are right, indeed; and it is very kind and very sensible of you to interest yourself on behalf of my poor little motherless girl.”

And they continued this practical friendly talk all the way up-hill and down-hill, discussing Regy’s shirts, Clevy’s jackets, Wattie’s pocket-money, &c. “What a shrewd, unaffected, capable young lady!” thought Dr. Norman.—“I am sure Laura could not have a better companion!”

Next day he set off for London. Kitty was up betimes, busying herself about the early breakfast and her host’s comfort, filling his flask, rubbing up his opera-glass, sewing on his buttons.

“Shall I pack your portmanteau?” she had ventured to say; but he refused; he pretended to be very indignant about the buttons, too; but she laughed at his indignation in such a

frank, pleasant way that he left off scolding, and was grateful instead. Then she poured out his tea quite naturally and calmly, and heard his last instructions about the children, and received his cheque for the children's expenses. One would have thought she was Dr. Norman's sister-in-law by the friendly tone she took towards him. When the carriage came up, and all the household came out to say adieu, she took Prissy and Wattie by the hand, and ran with them down to the front-gate to see papa off. Dr. Norman looked back, nodding and waving his handkerchief quite gaily. Never since becoming a widower had he left home under such happy auspices. Even Prissy forebore to cry, and he felt sure that, under Kitty's rule, all would go well.

CHAPTER VI.

KITTY EX CATHEDRÀ.

OF course all did go well, for Kitty had so determined, and Kitty had a will. Before Dr. Norman went away she had said to herself, "I don't mind how much these children trouble and tire me. I don't mind how much Prissy's whims or Regy's jealousies perplex me. If I have to rise at five o'clock every morning to please Regy, to dress fifty dolls a day to please Prissy, I will do it. Laura shall sentimentalize all day and never find me unsympathetic ; Clevy shall always find me ready to play draughts or cricket. I shall always have sweets in my pocket for Wattie, and will cut paper horses for him whenever it rains. I will gossip with old Symonds, and make her a grand satin pin-cushion. I will please all the other maids, and

buy them new caps. There isn't a soul in the place I am going to neglect or dissatisfy ; and by the time Dr. Norman comes home, he shall have Kitty Silver, Kitty Silver, Kitty Silver, dinned in his ears from morning till night."

At first she did not lie on a bed of roses. Nothing is more difficult than to dance to everybody's fiddle, and Kitty had resolved upon dancing to everybody's fiddle. She found that this would cost no little time or tranquillity ; but what were time and tranquillity to her in comparison with some other things ? Flattery is the golden key that unlocks most minds, and Kitty knew how to handle that key very dexterously, never breaking or hampering a lock, never setting about the task noisily or too much on a sudden. By various devices and expediences she managed to make herself necessary to everybody—and—herein lay her crowning piece of cleverness—to make everybody appear equally necessary to her.

The Normans were good children, but they had one fault—they were jealous. They could not love Kitty as other boys and girls would have done, moderately and ready to

make another idol on the morrow ; but they must love her blindly, impetuously, each craving her love and friendship, each ready to quarrel with the other about her most trifling deed or word. At first, it was always thus : “ Oh ! Kitty has given you that doll, has she ? Then I shall throw my top away, for I’m sure the doll cost double ; ” or, “ Kitty is going to walk to church with you, Master Clevy ! That’s an idea, indeed ! If she doesn’t walk with me, I shall stay at home ; ” or, “ Kitty is my friend, and you must not always want her company ; ” and so on. But Kitty, who combined the wisdom of the serpent with the gentleness of the dove, soon found a remedy for this spirit of captiousness. First, she appealed to their vanity, and next she appealed to their pride. For instance, she would take Regy aside, and say to him : “ Regy, you are old enough to be my friend ; and if you do not help me whilst your father is away, I shall go away too. You are not a boy in years ; why do you sometimes make me forget that you are so little younger than I ? I should not have consented to stay unless I had looked upon your

society as some little compensation for other things. I love the children, as you know; but I'm not a child myself, and they sometimes weary me and dishearten me, loving as they are." And such speeches as these, often accompanied by the glisten of a tear in her eyes, made Regy beside himself with penitence and enthusiasm. It was wonderful to see how much older and taller he seemed to grow in the course of a few weeks. He cared a great deal more for reading novels to Miss Silver than cricketing with his friends, and grew bold enough to offer her bouquets, to button her gloves, to carry her parasol, to praise her bonnet. Everything Miss Silver did was well done, everything she wore was pretty, everything she said was clever in Regy's estimation. And what wonder? Any woman who is gracious and handsome becomes a goddess to boys of eighteen,—and. Kitty was very gracious and handsome, people said. Kitty managed Prissy on a wholly different principle. The child lived entirely in her affections, and learned to love very slowly. Kitty could not love her at once, but she determined to love her by rule and rote, and to win her love in return.

It is by no means impossible to love by rule and rote, neither is it impossible to make that love appear bright and good, as electro-plate imitates silver. And Kitty's imitations were always excellent. She compassed the child with sweet observances ; she toiled for her from morning till night ; she was ready to turn the house upside-down to please her. "Oh, Prissy," she said, many and many a time, "I let all the others go in order to make you fond of me, and I am no more to you than I ever was! Prissy, you would love me if you knew how alone I am in the world. I have no papa, no sisters, no brothers, and yet Prissy won't love me."

It ended by Prissy loving her more fervently than the rest ; and after that conquest, Kitty's ways became ways of pleasantness, and her paths paths of peace. Shelley House was nicer than Paradise Place, Kitty thought, as she ruled supreme in it during these balmy days of late summer. She liked the spaciousness, the abundance, the slovenly, easy-going, inconsequent well-being of the place. It was a sort of Bohemia. Order or anything like routine were unknown. The common events of life never

repeated themselves from day, to day as in other houses. Every meal was a surprise, either in the matter or manner of it. Every noteworthy occurrence, whether in the way of work or play, was a precedent. Sometimes a big gong would sound at eight o'clock in the morning, and all the household, like a troop of rabbits scuttling to feed, would rush into the breakfast-room to hear Dr. Norman read prayers. One Sunday he would carry the children to church, on another to chapel, on a third to the Quaker's meeting-house. Once or twice a host of plasterers and masons had appeared at Shelley House. "Papa says I may have the place done up, if I choose to see to it," Regy had said, explanatorily; but he had not seen to it, and the plasterers and masons appeared no more. One day the children woke up determined to be industrious, and from morning till night, Regy and Clevy shut themselves up in their carpenter's shop, and the girls sat sewing over a basket of clothes for the poor. Another day Regy chose to dig a canal in the kitchen-garden, and a pretty mess he made of it. No place was sacred except Dr. Norman's study, and the corridor

leading to it, which was closed by a baize door. Not even Prissy presumed to open that door without leave.

“Was it always so?” Kitty once asked of old Symonds the housekeeper; “in Mrs. Norman’s time, I mean?”

The old woman lifted up her hands deprecatingly.

“My dear Miss, Mrs. Norman was just like the children, as full of spirits as an egg is full of meat; and, like them, handsome too, but she hadn’t as much order in her whole body as you have in your little finger. The house looked better then, because she kept more servants, and the furniture was new; but, Lord bless your heart! neither she nor master cared to see anything spick and span. Not they. Mistress was very fond of music, and master was always wrapped up in his books, as he is now, only that mistress was a good deal with him. The house might go, and the house did go, and it’s done nothing but go ever since. I should like to rise from my grave and see the place in apple-pie order when Master Regy comes to it. Not that I wish anything to hap-

pen to master ; I'm sure I feel like a mother to him ; only you know, Miss, one don't expect to use brushes and brooms in heaven, and it's a shame, as I think, not to be tidy whilst here below ; but there's no making master of women's way of thinking, none whatsoever."

Kitty saw no necessity for making Dr. Norman tidy, though she had feigned a little tidiness herself, by way of pleasing the maids ; she therefore tried to introduce no new element into the household, rather fostering the old, only taking great care that the disorder should be bright and pleasant and comfortable. She coaxed Symonds into dismissing one or two inefficient servants, and hiring more capable ones. She coaxed the gardener into putting the garden into order. She coaxed everybody into the persuasion that she herself was the fittest person to order the dinner. As time wore on, and Dr. Norman's return might be expected in a week or two, Kitty reviewed her campaign triumphantly. The children were all supplied with new-fashioned, well-made clothes ; the cook scavenged the poultry-yard and the vegetable-garden, and sent up savoury dishes ;

new flowers were planted round the house: the broken furniture was mended, a little more plate was got out. In fine, without having brought about a revolution, Kitty had wholly changed the face of things. One could see now that a woman reigned in the house. She did not forget her old friends in these busy days. She thought of them as she wandered through the wilderness of orchard, viney, and kitchen-garden, as she helped Prissy to feed the chickens and ducks, as she went with Regy into the well-stocked cellar, saying to herself, "If they could only have the crumbs that fall from the children's table!"

It was a land of Goshen, this old-fashioned homestead, and she had come from the veritable Bohemia, where the fruit is always plucked before it ripens, and the fountains are running over to-day and dry to-morrow. One afternoon, she sat quite alone in the drawing-room, thinking of these things with a smile upon her lips. How she wished the whole merry disorderly troop could drop down from the clouds for a little while—Polly Cornford, Perry, Papa Peter, and all. There is no envy in Bohemia,

and she knew they would enjoy vicariously the sight of the good things with which she was surrounded. She could write and tell them about everything in glowing colours enough, but only personal experience could make them understand what a home Shelley House had become to her. Dr. Norman's wife could hardly have been a more absolute mistress in his house than she was now; and though she had not a spice of authoritativeness in her composition, she liked to have her opinion considered of more weight than other people's. If you wish to be popular, you must not have too many opinions, and Kitty took care that hers were always inoffensive ones. Who can blame her that she hungered and thirsted after the favour of the rich, seeing that she was so poor and so alone in the world ?

Kitty leaned back in her easy-chair, a novel on her lap, scents of flowers and ripe hops blowing across her face, not a care for to-morrow disturbing her contented mood. She had somewhat neglected Perry of late, a thought that might have pricked a little; but he was so forgiving, he would be cold for a moment, and

then fond for a year. She knew Perry very well.

How good it was to be here! How good it was! There were two bay-windows in this drawing-room, and Kitty did not see, as she sat and dreamed, that some one was walking across the lawn towards her. A low vagabondish “Whew!” caused her to jump from her seat and turn round.

“Oh! Perry!” she cried, in a voice of dismay. He stalked across the room, the same Perry as ever, his long fair hair blown about wildly, his clothes, large, but very loose and indefinite like his moral notions, and saturated with the smoky, painty atmosphere of Paradise Place. He would fain have kissed Kitty after lover-like fashion, but she drew back.

“Oh! Perry!” she repeated.

But in a moment it flashed upon her that, as Dr. Norman was from home, Perry’s visit could do no particular harm; and, being a Bohemian at heart still, it made her happy that some one had come for whom she could kill the fatted calf. So her manner changed, and she shook his hand warmly, and asked after Polly

and Papa Peter and the children ; laughing quite gaily and naturally.

“ You shouldn’t have come,” she said ; “ but as only the boys and children are at home, it doesn’t much matter ; and it is pleasant to see you again, Perry.”

“ I want you to go back with me, Kitty.”

“ What else do you want ?” Kitty asked ; and fetching a brush from the hall, she set to work to brush his clothes, turning him to right and left, as if he had been a child.

“ Would you mind losing an inch or two of hair ?” she asked insinuatingly ; and he said he didn’t at all mind ; whereupon she took up her scissors, and click, click, off went Perry’s long locks, like Samson’s under the hand of Delilah. In the midst of this operation she heard footsteps on the threshold. Quick as lightning, brush, scissors, and locks were thrust in her pocket ; and when Regy entered, the two stood talking about the weather, as any lady and gentleman might do.

“ This gentleman is an old friend of mine from London,” Kitty said, “ who happened to be down this way, and called upon me.

Mr. Perugino Neeve—Mr. Reginald Norman."

There was so much boyish *bonhomie* about Perry, that Regy felt at ease with him instantly.

"I'm so glad to see you," he said. "Won't you be able to stay to dinner?—or you have not had lunch, perhaps?"

Perry expressed himself quite willing to take lunch and stay to dinner too.

"I'll order Mr. Neeve's lunch up at once, Miss Silver," Regy added; "then we can get out for a drive before the children come back from their walk."

Perry made his lunch last as long as he could, heartily wishing that the children would come back. He wanted to have Kitty all to himself, and he saw that Regy was no boy to be cheated out of her company surreptitiously. But Regy made haste to order the carriage, and poor Perry could but submit.

The carriage came to the door, a low basket chaise with room for four persons only. Regy very politely gave his guest the seat of honour, so that Perry had at least the satisfaction of sitting by Kitty's side; and as Regy had to drive, sitting sideways, his face was turned

away from them a good deal. When opportunity offered, Perry whispered under Kitty's parasol,

"Kitty, you must come back; it is so miserable without you!" And when the pony was lazy, and Regy had to turn round and urge him on pretty severely, Perry ventured on a longer and more tender speech, *sotto voce*, such as, "I shall not go back without knowing when we may expect you, Kitty; upon my word, I shall not!"

Kitty took refuge in frank, outspoken interest in Paradise Place.

"Mr. Norman will excuse us for talking a little of old friends, won't you?" she said to Regy with a pleasant smile; and of course Regy was delighted that they should talk of old friends. Perry, in no very good spirits or temper, began thus:

"Well, Kitty, the pot-boilers are not thriving, I can promise you."

"Pot-boilers?" asked Regy, inquiringly.

"Mr. Neeve is an artist, and uses artists' slang," Kitty said, laughing; "a pot-boiler means a picture that is painted just to make

money by; in fact, that the pot may boil. Isn't it a strange way of talking? And why doesn't the pot-boiler thrive, Perry?" Seeing Regy look more astonished still, she added, "Mr. Neeve and I played together as children, and are such very old friends that we always call ourselves by our Christian names."

"Nothing goes on as it should do," said Perry; and, Regy turning his head just then, he added, "as if you didn't know why."

The drive did not go on as it should have done either, for something was amiss with the harness, and Regy had to alight once or twice to adjust it. Perry, who grew more impatient and rash every moment, heartily wished that the trap would collapse altogether. It did, indeed, threaten to do so, for the pony was a perverse pony, and shied constantly; but still no excuse offered for getting out to walk. The country around was lovely. They had climbed through a succession of shady lanes to the brow of a hill, from which they looked down on a sea of golden corn. The effulgence of ripened wheat and barley, the bright blue sky, the purple bluffs and woods rising in the

distance, made a sight to gladden an artist's heart; and then they passed wholly out of the warm mellow region of the uplands, and entered dusky aisles of oak and elm, where all was cool and solemn and quiet, save for the mingled notes of thousands of little birds. But Perry's heart was sore, and refused to be gladdened. Had he come here with Polly Cornford and Kitty, and one or two of the fellows, as he called his friends, his gaiety would have been like the gaiety of a child, almost foolish in its abandonment. He would have climbed the hazel-trees and gathered nuts like a squirrel; he would have thrown himself at full length on the grass, and quoted Béranger and Heine; he would have dressed Kitty's head with wild vine-leaves, and called her his Bacchante; he would have sung to her how

“ Brown Adam rigg'd a bower in gude greenwood
Above his ladye and him.”

Bnt Perry could not sing or be frolicsome to-day. He did not care for the wood or the harvest-fields or the sweet-smelling hop-gardens. He wished himself thousands of miles away.

Kitty's unreserved manner, and Regy's perfect ease with her, displeased and disconcerted him, and he was quite ready to manifest his ill-humour when occasion offered. When the drive came to an end, she sent Regy away on some plausible behest, and, taking Perry's arm, led him to a quiet summer-house.

"Here we can have five minutes' talk," she said, sitting down. "In the first place, Perry, what made you come down here in such a temper? You should have staid at home till you felt a little more cheerful."

"Tell me one thing," Perry said, very sharply,—"what have I to make me feel cheerful? Are you not more inclined to stay here than ever you were? Have you not been talking to that boy of a hundred plans for your amusement? I see plainly that you prefer the life here to that with us."

"You speak as if a few words were a lifetime. Am I to blame because I like a little innocent pleasure? Men never seem to understand how dull women's lives are."

"It is not a question of a few weeks' pleasure," Perry said, growing calm. "God knows

I like you to be gay, Kitty, but I see, I know, I feel, that the longer you stay here, the less willing you will be to come back to us."

And Perry's eyes grew big and heavy with tears, and his under-lip trembled.

Kitty could not bear to see him look miserable.

"Perry," she said, and her voice was soft,— "Perry, I have never yet deceived you in anything: why do you judge me so harshly? Wait a little, and I shall grow tired of being here, I am sure I shall; if I am not tired, I will come back to you all the same."

"But the better you like the place, the more unwise it is of you to stay. All this sort of thing is like taking opium."

"What sort of thing?"

"Pony-carriages, croquet-grounds, plenty of servants, and so on," Perry added, with an explanatory wave of the hand; "all this sort of thing is very well in its way, and so are mansions in Belgravia, powdered footmen, and court-balls, but Fortune can't serve everybody, alike and Fortune hasn't served you or me to her creams and custards."

“Don’t moralize, Perry.”

“So long as we have a good appetite, what does it all matter?” Perry added. “Let those eat the creams and custards who have got ‘em, but let you and I love each other, and we shall envy nobody’s feast.”

And as he said this, he took both her hands in his, and looked into her eyes beseechingly.

“Dear Perry,” she said, and her face softened—“dear Perry;” but beyond this expression of affection, Perry could get nothing out of her.

He was by no means satisfied. How could he be satisfied? Had she not given him stones for bread? Was it not as clear to him as the first axiom of Euclid that she loved money? that it was as necessary to her existence as love, baby’s babble, a man’s protection to other women? The man who would win her must come as Jupiter did to Danæ, in a shower of gold; and it was only now and then, in a rare flush of ambition, that he felt he should ever be that man. In spite of these gloomy thoughts, he made merry with her and the children over the dinner. Regy was a very good host, and,

when the ladies retired, brought out some old port, and behaved in quite a manly fashion. What with the wine, and the merry talk, and the home-like informal atmosphere of the place, Perry's heart grew gradually lighter, and he did not leave Shelley House till a late hour.

"Come again," repeated Regy and Clevy many times; "Do come again," little Laura said, blushing.

Kitty said nothing, but her looks did not bid him to come again. Instead of an invitation, she slipped a fond little note into his hands, telling him only to have patience and all would go well.

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE HOP-GARDEN.

IT was now the perfect season of the year. The sky was of that soft serene blue, seen only in autumn ; the air was heavy with woodland sweets, the beech-woods seemed tipped with fire. Throughout the length and breadth of the Weald of Kent—the beautiful Weald of Kent !—it was a bacchanal from morning till night. For years the farmers had not seen so abundant a hop-harvest ; and as plenty naturally brings cheerfulness, and cheerfulness is infectious, everyone went to work in the highest spirits. The Rhenish vintage is not a more poetic sight than a Kentish hop-garden in September. You see then what the real hardy English labourer is—red-skinned, fair-haired, broad-shouldered, and almost Herculean in

strength ; you see him make love, slyly winking his blue eye, and showing his white teeth ; or you see him play with his children—for the tiniest white-haired toddler comes into the hop-garden, as a matter of course—and then, what king so happy as he ? Listen to the talk of two or three labouring folks for ten minutes, and compare it to the talk of ordinary ladies and gentlemen over tea and croquet. You will not find the former the most insipid ; on the contrary, perhaps, you will wish you could escape from the tea-table and croquet-lawn oftener. Hard-working people do not, as a rule, talk for the sake of talking, but their child-like, healthy, unphysicked understandings are brought to bear upon practical subjects, with a raciness and broad humour that amply compensate for more delicate qualities.

There was a good-sized farm attached to Shelley House, which Dr. Norman pretended to farm, but which was in reality left much to itself. It seemed to thrive pretty well, and it was the children's delight, of all others, to help in whatever work might be going on, whether sowing, reaping, or gathering in. In these

bright September days they were always in the hop-gardens: Regy ordering in cider and ale like a master, Clevy helping to pull down the fragrant tendrils, Wattie playing or fighting with some little peasant lad, the girls working and reading in some shady nook close by. It was a happy time; no one had any cares, no one wanted yesterday to return or to-morrow to come; the joy of living in such sunshine and breathing such sweet air seemed enough. Even Kitty, who had ambitions, felt lulled into a quiet mood by the influences around her. The smell of the hops so acted upon her nerves—so she wrote to poor, perturbed, impatient Perry—that for the present, she always felt in a dreamy, soporific state, and could not bring herself to decide upon anything. For Perry was always urging upon her to return as soon as ever Dr. Norman should be home again, and she would not promise this. She was quite sure in her own mind that Dr. Norman would urge her to stay, and she determined upon staying. What excuse she might find, with what sophistry or logic she might prevail upon Perry to forego and forgive her absence, was a

point she left utterly to chance. It was impossible to foretell how much chance might help her, and if not, there were other helps to rely upon.

Regy's holidays were drawing to a close, and this made Kitty alike glad and sorry. She had grown very fond of Regy, and the boy adored her, but she did not know what she should do with his adoration when Dr. Norman was back again. It would be laughable for Dr. Norman to find that, during his absence, Regy had taken to the pastime of falling in love. She wanted Dr. Norman to find everything going on as smoothly as possible—no quarrels, no excitements, certainly no courtships.

A hop-garden is just the place to induce dreamy thought, and, dismissing every idea that could disturb her, Kitty liked to lie quite still on the grass, to close her eyes, and to imagine all sorts of pleasant things. "Let me go to sleep," she would say to the young ones, and having made her a pillow of hop-leaves, they were sure to leave her quiet till she stirred; then, as she lay thus, she really did sleep, and she slept so long, that the children got tired of

sitting still, and crept away to play, one by one.

One day, when she awoke from such a siesta, there was no one near her but Regy. He sat on the ground, and as she looked up, she encountered his bright brown eyes fixed upon her, with such an expression of seriousness in them that she thought something must be the matter.

“What is it?” she asked.

“I did not say anything,” the boy said, and blushed over the speech.

Half guessing what the look and blush meant, Kitty put her hand on his arm, and uttered his name in a tender, confiding way. She could not bear him to have an unhappy moment on her account.

“What is it?” she repeated, and the tone of her voice conveyed some such consolation as this: Can I not, will I not make all right? He took her words as she had intended them.

“You will laugh at me, or be angry with me; I don’t like to tell you,” he said, and he began plucking a rose to pieces that he had intended to give her with a pretty speech only five minutes ago. Kitty saw that he wished to tell her,

in spite of the excuse, and it was part of her character to help people towards the fulfilment of their wishes. So she took the rose from his hands, playfully, and scolded him for destroying anything so pretty, and for distrusting her.

“When have I ever laughed at you, or been angry with you?” she said; and she said it with such gentleness that he felt inspired with courage, and spoke out like a man.

“I wish you would laugh at me, or be angry,” he said; “I wish I didn’t care about you so much, because I am a boy, and I don’t suppose that if I came to you in three years’ time, and say—Kitty, I love you! that you would do anything else but laugh then.”

Kitty looked at him very seriously.

“Why should I laugh?” she said. “Girls are always older for their years than boys, and I have had many things to make me feel old. But I am not so old, dear Regy, that what you say now, or might say three years hence, need make me laugh.”

The boy went on, never daring to look at her—

“In three years’ time I shall be a man, you know, and I mean to work hard at Oxford, and do all sorts of things to help me forward. It doesn’t seem a long time to me ; but what if I should come back and find you married ?”

“That isn’t at all likely.”

“Are you quite sure,—quite, quite sure ?”

“How you catechize ! I am quite sure that it isn’t in the least likely.”

“And if, at the end of three years’ time, you were not married ?”

“Well, what then ?”

“Would you——” Regy hesitated and blushed again—“would you think of me ?”

Kitty thought for a moment, and then answered him in a candid manner, as if the question under consideration were a most important, nay, a vitally important one, and worthy of all the deliberation she could bestow upon it.

“If I were to promise you that, Regy, I should be promising what I might not be able to fulfil, and that would be very unfair to you. One can never say what one will do in three years’ time. You yourself may view things in quite another light then——”

“Never!” put in Regy, fervently.

“I do not say you will, dear Regy—I say you may; and I do not say that I should either—I only say that I might.”

Regy’s eyes seemed to fill with fire on a sudden.

“Oh, Kitty!” he cried, too earnest to be ashamed now—“oh, Kitty! is it possible that you care for me a little?”

“You foolish boy! as if I should have stayed here all these weeks without you. Have you not been my companion and friend? Have I not come to you in all my difficulties? But it would be unwise of us to go beyond that sort of friendship at present, Regy; in fact, it would be almost wrong.”

“Wrong?”

“I think so; wrong on my part, I mean. It would be betraying the confidence your father places in me.”

“But papa has no sort of authority over you, and he wouldn’t dream of opposing me in anything.”

“You didn’t understand me, Regy,” Kitty continued, still quite tender and earnest. “I

was left, as it were, like an elder sister, to look after you, to make you all happy, and see that things went on well in the house. Dear Regy, what would Dr. Norman say to find that during his absence you and I had been making love to each other? Only wait a little, till——”

“Till you are married!” cried Regy, with a touch of boyish petulance. “Isn’t that what you mean, Kitty?”

“No, that is not at all what I mean. Who so unlikely to marry as I? I mean, dear Regy, and I should say the same to you if you were ten years older, that you, being Dr. Norman’s eldest son, have no right to talk of love to me in his absence, and I have equally no right to listen; only wait a little——”

“Till papa comes home?” asked Regy, opening his eyes very wide indeed. “Do you mean to say that I ought to ask papa whether I may be engaged to you or not? Kitty, I couldn’t.”

“I meant to say,” Kitty said, putting her hand on his arm with charming frankness, “that if you will repeat the same story to me three years hence, nay, two years hence, or, as you

are so impatient, a year hence, I will listen to the end and not scold you."

Regy was not bold enough to kiss that soft hand, ecstatically as he admired it, but he picked up a curl of woodbine she had been playing with and put it into his purse, declaring that he would keep it for ever.

Kitty saw no harm in this, and let him have his way. Prissy and Clevy had their playthings—why should not Regy have his? She only took care to extract a promise of good behaviour from him before the little scene came to an end, and rewarded him for it by all sorts of covert observances afterwards. She appealed to him for advice and assistance in little matters, with a sort of affectionate reliance that might have meant anything or nothing. And Regy was satisfied, on the whole; he felt, though he would not own it, more grateful to her than if she had directly encouraged his suit. Kitty was only a few years older than himself, and how many men married women older than themselves; but—but—Regy was quite convinced in his own mind that Dr. Norman would see a great many "buts" to the matter. Dr. Norman allowed his

boys and girls almost entire liberty, on the principle that he wished each boy and each girl to have an individual character; but he was always a little stern with them when they outraged common sense. Extravagance, petulance, obstinacy, and any fault of temper, he overlooked readily, whilst a really foolish act or pointless speech was sure to be lashed pretty sharply. Knowing this, Regy was content to wait till his beard should grow a little.

Dr. Norman came home unexpectedly; but Kitty had taken care that his room should be ready, and that his coming should not appear sudden. It was late one afternoon when he returned, and he thought, as he unlatched the front gate softly and tooked towards the lawn, that never since his wife's death had he come back in such cheerful mood. How pretty and pleasant the old place looked in the light of the red autumnal sunset, all the windows bright as fire, all the shrubberies cool and dusky, and happy young voices ringing through them!

He was on the point of shouting, "Prissy, Laura, Wattie, where are you?" when a merry laugh met his ear, and some one dashed through

the laurels like a hare which is hunted. It was Kitty. She wore a light summer dress, and as she had been playing hide-and-seek for the last half-hour, it was gathered up in her hands, so that one saw her beautifully shaped feet pretty plainly, and her little high-heeled slippers covered with scarlet embroidery. She had put on Clevy's boating-hat, and what with her flushed cheeks, and her tumbled hair, looked younger and prettier than she really was ; for Kitty might fairly be called handsome, but not pretty as a rule. When she saw Dr. Norman, she stopped short and was almost ready to run away and never see his face any more for very mortification. Nothing could have happened more unfortunate for her. Dr. Norman might have surprised her a hundred times, and never at so unseemly a time as now. Had he come at early morning he would have found her reading to Prissy, or mending Clevy's socks ; had he come in the afternoon, he would have found her busily packing Regy's portmanteau—for Regy was to leave the next day ; had he come only an hour before, he would have found her casting up the weekly accounts with Symonds.

She wanted him, naturally, to see her in a dignified, reliable, mother-like light, and he had found her romping with the boys like any hoyden of fourteen! But she collected herself, and made the best of her dilemma.

“We are so glad to see you back,” she said; “the poor children have grown quite impatient for you, and I have consoled them by joining in their games, as you see.”

“It is very good of you,” Dr. Norman said; and then Regy and the little ones came running to him one after the other, and he forgot all about Kitty for awhile.

The little ones were ready to tear him to pieces in their eagerness for the twentieth kiss or embrace, whilst Regy and Laura could hardly get in a word. Dr. Norman expostulated, but in vain, and when he fairly got indoors, and was able to sit down, the kissing and embracing began again.

“Oh, my dear, dear, sweet papa!” cried Prissy, hugging his hands; “it was so miserable whilst you were away!”

“You don’t appear as if you had been miserable, any one of you,” Dr. Norman said, looking

at each by turns. "I never saw such a splendid look of health in my life as you all have, Symonds included. I think, Miss Silver, you must have been dieting my household on scientific principles: so much salts of potash, so much sugar, so much starch, per diem, eh?"

"Miss Silver wouldn't let us eat cucumber, or hot pies for supper," put in Prissy, a little inclined to think that, now Dr. Norman had come back, the nice suppers would come back too.

"And quite right," Dr. Norman said; "but have you all been kind to Miss Silver since I went away? Have you all waited on her and helped her?"

"They have been very kind, and they have all waited on me and helped me," Kitty said simply; and for this speech, Miss Prissy, who was conscious of many a caprice and temporary fit of injustice towards Kitty, threw herself in her arms and kissed her. Kitty left Dr. Norman and his children for a little while, in order to make the tea, to have his portmanteau unpacked, to do a hundred housewifely things; and whilst she was gone, you may be sure the

young ones sounded her praises. In Prissy's eyes only, Kitty was not perfect. She praised her, she called her clever, and nice, and kind ; but there was a certain something in the child's tone and look, that went far to undo her praise.

"Clevy says I don't like Kitty," she said, "but he knows nothing about it, papa. I'm very fond of Kitty ; she dresses all my dolls, and I ought to be fond of her ; but put down your ear, papa, for I have something to whisper in it —a great secret. Clevy, get away ; Laura, stop your ears. Now, papa."

Dr. Norman leaned down, and the child put her round little mouth close to his ear, and a dimpled hand on each side.

"I think, papa, but I'm not sure, that Kitty told a story once!"

Prissy was naturally reproved.

CHAPTER VIII.

PERRY'S LETTER.

NO one possessing an ordinary amount of character returns to his usual mode of life after several weeks' travel quite the same person he left it. Even minds of the most common quality are affected more or less by outward events, as dull stone gradually gets a rich colour without any principle of receptivity within ; but a man or woman whose intellectual and moral capacity is above the average, may be said to gain largeness and strength with the seasons, like trees. Dr. Norman came back from Norway in a fresher and brighter state, mentally and physically. He had gone away looking like an overworked London student, he had come home looking as bronzed and sturdy as one of his labourers. Kitty did not see more

of him than before, but he was infinitely more genial and pleasant when in her company. To men it is much easier to form new domestic relationships than to women, and seeing this bright, willing, capable girl, placed, he hardly knew how, at the head of this household, he was content. But his contentment was not wholly the contentment of selfishness. He formally, for once and for all, consulted his children on the subject of Kitty's staying at Shelley House. For instance, he took Laura aside, and asked her such questions as these :

“Tell me frankly, Laura—are you happier here with Miss Silver than you were at school with all your friends ?”

“Oh, papa, a great deal happier ! Kitty is so nice : nobody could be nicer than she is.”

“But I fear your accomplishments are sadly running to seed. What is become of your music, French, and German, calisthenics, and use of the globes ?”

“I practise my pieces, papa, and Kitty reads instructive books to us—such as ‘Miss Strickland’s Lives of the Queens of England,’ and ‘Boswell’s Life of Johnson !’ ”

“And do you ride on your pony every day, and go to bed at eight o’clock ?”

“How absurd, papa ! Eight o’clock ! But I do go at nine punctually, and ride Dickybird every day.”

Matters standing thus satisfactorily with Laura, Dr. Norman catechized Prissy.

“Tell me, Prissy,” he said, “isn’t Prissy very, very fond of Miss Silver ? I want to know.”

The little girl thought and thought.

“Miss Silver makes everybody like her,” she said at last, “and Laura likes her—and, oh ! Regy, he does like her, and I—I like her—but I like people best who don’t want me to be fond of them. I like Grace Davenport better, though she declares that I am not her friend ; and I like Symonds better, though I know Symonds’ pet is Wattie.”

“But you ought to like Miss Silver better because she tries to make you love her, oughtn’t you, Prissy ?”

“Why ought I, papa ? Why ought I to care for one person more than another ?”

“Oh, metaphysical Prissy !”

"Meta—, what, papa? Why do you use such funny words?"

"But about Miss Silver, Prissy. You wouldn't like her to go away, would you?"

"She isn't going away, I know," said Miss Prissy, confidently.

"You can't know that."

"Yes, I can, papa."

"But why should you be so sure?"

"Because I am. That is why, papa."

"Go away!" cried Dr. Norman, half impatient, half admiring. "You are a pretentious pussy, that is what you are, and a pretentious pussy who talks of much she doesn't understand."

In spite of being thus taken down, Prissy would come to Dr. Norman and her sister again and again with little stories of Miss Silver. Miss Silver was always doing some wonderful thing or other in the child's eyes, and she could not understand how it was that no one else saw as much as she did.

One day—oh, monstrous!—she happened to go into Miss Silver's bedroom, and found a stocking with such a big hole in it lying on a chair! "You may laugh if you please, Miss Laura, but

I saw it; I did see it!" Another day she pounced upon Miss Silver to give her a shower of kisses on account of some piece of benevolence or other,—“and what do you think Miss Silver was writing? She was writing—*Dear Perry, how can you be such a fool?*—wasn’t that very rude of her?” On a third occasion, Miss Prissy happened to be passing by the open door of Regy’s room: Kitty was busily packing Regy’s things for Eton,—“and what do you think she let Regy do when she was sitting on the portmanteau to press it down? She let him put on her slipper that had fallen off!” Laura used to turn very red, and work herself up into a pretty little passion at hearing this; and the sisters would be enemies for five minutes.

“It is so mean, so unladylike, so babyish, to tittle-tattle as you do, Prissy,” she would say; “if you do that when you are older, people will hate you.”

“I like to be hated sometimes,” Prissy replied, vindictively.

“Oh! very well, then; I will let you make yourself as disagreeable as you like.”

Dr. Norman came in during one of these little

scenes, and, seeing the children both flushed with temper, and hearing "Kitty, Kitty," nothing but Kitty on their tongues, grew very severe.

"You are the eldest, Laura, and it is you on whom the responsibility of such conduct rests. If I see any more of this kind of thing, I shall tell Miss Silver she had better go, till you can both be more amiable."

This threat sounded awful even in Prissy's ears, for Kitty had managed to make herself necessary to her in many ways. Prissy had never had such dolls' toilettes before the arrival of Miss Silver—never such dolls' cushions, carpets, and cradle furniture—never such dolls' parties. So Prissy exercised a little self-control for the next few days, and Dr. Norman heard no more scolding and crying.

Meantime Regy went away, and Kitty felt as if a great burden had slipped off her shoulders. She liked the lad, and appreciated his admiration for herself, but his budding sentimentality bored her. She had begun to find that it was not an easy matter to be everybody's heroine; she had too many threads in her

hand, and was always on the point of making a false stitch, and letting one of the threads go wrong altogether. Regy gone, there remained one person less to please systematically all day long, and consequently the day's work became less onerous.

The perfection of art is to conceal art, and Miss Silver, who had lived among artists, and learned, parrot-wise, a good many artistic dogmas, now began to apply them. She was careful to subdue her bright colours, so as not to hurt cultivated eyes ; and she took good care to have her gaiety subdued, and her sadness never too solemn.

For instance, when Dr. Norman once found her on the point of crying, she dashed an impatient hand across her bright eyes, and said,

“ How absurd I am, Dr. Norman, to trouble myself about my future, when everyone is so good, and everything pleasant here, and you wish me to stay ? ”

“ Of course I wish you to stay,” Dr. Norman said with some concern ; “ and I think I understood from Laura that you liked it.”

“ Above everything,” Kitty said, eagerly. “ I

have few friends—none who are rich enough to offer me such a home as this—and if you found me half-crying just now, it was because I was thinking of all the kindness I cannot repay."

Dr. Norman, seeing that her eyes were full, gave her a hearty shake of the hand and hurried away.

Kitty had not confessed the real cause of her tears; which was a letter lying snugly in her pocket. It had come that day from Paradise Place, and ran as follows:—

“DEAR KITTY,

“I would run down to see you, only I know how provoked you would be. Oh, Kitty! it isn’t your staying away that will ever make me a steady fellow. I just get into a devil-mecare sort of way, and my money is spent three times over before it is half earned. I shall never get money or credit whilst you stay away, Kitty, never; and I am losing my chances of ever getting a name, and holding my own against the dealers. That picture of mine, the Corot sort of thing with big trees full of yellow sunset—you remember it, I daresay—is finished

now, and not worth a five-pound note. I got desponding and bilious over it, and daubed it with yellow till it is half-like a London fog, and half like a sandpit after heavy rains. If you were to come back I might perhaps alter it a little, but it will never be worth much. I went out with Crosby Carrington the other night. They stood me a supper at Evans', and I believe I drank too much. Oh, Kitty, Kitty! you will bring worse things on me than this if you stay away longer, and get half an inch farther off us every day.

“PERRY.”

Whilst Kitty was reading this letter, she saw a vision of Perry writing it. She could see him sitting at his three-legged writing-table in his shirt-sleeves, his fair hair pulled desperately over his brows, his toilette utterly reckless, his beard untrimmed, the atmosphere surrounding him, dingy, dusty, painty. He would be sure to look very pale, having kept late hours; and she thought she could see him biting his nails between each sentence, and trying to be more sorry than indignant, and more pitiful than

tender. Perry was as dear to Kitty as a kitten is dear to a child ; and thinking of him in this mood she shed a few tears.

CHAPTER IX.

MRS. CORNFORD ACTS THE PART OF CONSOLER.

MRS. CORNFORD was ready to cry herself at seeing her adopted son Perry in such a state of despondency. She did her utmost to console him for Kitty's lengthened absence, and, what was better still, to cure him of his passion. But both tasks seemed as hopeless as that of Sisyphus ; and Perry, who was as unstable as water when he had a fair chance of success, was dogged to any degree where his chances were those of little boys fishing for big fish with bent pins. He could have painted marvellous pictures with only a very little more study and care ; he could have won fortune, friends, plenty of good things, had he chosen ; but he chose to prefer Kitty to all, just because Kitty alone was inaccessible. It was the old

story. What little lad of six does not prefer his papa's riding-whip to any of his own toys, for the simple reason he must not play with it? Perry knew well enough what little hold he had upon Kitty's affections. She called herself a friendless girl, and used formerly to comfort him by saying that she had no one but him to care about her. But he knew well enough that no one was less friendless than she. She lived, indeed, upon an income of friendliness. She drew constant cheques upon that bank, and not one had been dishonoured yet. She had neither kith nor kin, it is true, but she had adopted brothers, uncles, sisters, aunts, and all the men he knew adored her. Who could help adoring her—if not for her wit, for her beauty; if not for her beauty, for her sprightliness; if not for her sprightliness, for her fine carriage? Moreover, Perry appreciated character, though he had so little himself, and seeing how Kitty could conquer and rule people, winding their wills like silk round her fingers, and how, being conquered and ruled, people adored her, he was ready to let his adoration go any length. If she threw him off, after having plighted her

troth to him, he would have his revenge—to that his mind was fully made up.

Perry's studio seemed to take colour and shape from his dreary mood. The carved oak cabinet grew blackish and funereal looking, the dingy statuettes threw up their arms or veiled their faces in despair, the lay figure grew more and more dishevelled and tragic, the palette showed nothing but dismal greys and browns, the picture on the easel was a mere bit of passionate sky blurred with big drops of rain like tears. There was a bunch of dead flowers in a broken vase, an empty bird-cage hanging in the window, a broken guitar resting against the mantel-piece, a faded pink neck-ribbon—precious relic of some holiday with Kitty—was fastened to the cracked mirror. Nothing could have looked more wilfully despondent than Perry's studio at this epoch. Perry himself caught the woe-begone aspect of things. He had ever been pale, but he was now flushed at times, and the flush had an unhealthy look about it; or he was ashy white, with dark circles under his eyes. He grew thinner than ever: and no

wonder, for he ate less and less, and went to bed in the small hours after supping unwholesomely, often off beer only. He smoked unmitigatedly ; that is to say, he smoked when he was hungry or when he was thirsty, when he had eaten and when he had drunk, when he was warm and when he was cold, when he was busy or when he was idle. Mrs. Cornford took him to task severely for such reckless behaviour.

“Before I tried to waste myself to a skeleton,” she said, “I would first see if there was no possibility of adding a stone of flesh to the little I possessed already. Finish that picture, take it to Blakesley, and go to Switzerland for a month with the money. If you don’t, you’ll catch cold the first foggy day that comes, and die before the winter is out.”

“What matter if I do?” cried Perry, impatiently.

“But you shan’t die, Perry, I can’t allow it ; I’ve other ideas about you. Now *do* set to work and earn lots of money ; Kitty would marry you then.”

“No, she wouldn’t. She will marry that rich widower down there, and throw me over altogether.”

“If she does that, she’s a heartless, worldly woman, and I’ll never lend her another six-pence.”

“Don’t abuse Kitty to me,” Perry went on, painting away as he spoke; “it isn’t because she is heartless or worldly, that she does this thing or that thing; it is because she’s inclined to do it, and she can’t help doing it. I do what I’m inclined to do; so do you, and it isn’t our fault that we do what other people scold us for doing.”

“Perry, you talk like a fool.”

“And fools always speak the truth.”

“But then there is no particular advantage in being a fool that I can see,” Mrs. Cornford said coolly. “You are doing the very thing to make Kitty marry the widower; Kitty likes the good things of this world, and has set her face against marrying a poor man. You were always as poor as a church-mouse, but now you are making yourself as thin as the paper the church-mouse feeds on. Will Kitty like you better for

being a tatterdemalion? Not she. She would marry you to-morrow, and you would live happy ever after, if you had a few thousand pounds of your own."

"I know that well enough."

"Don't sigh and look suicidal. Set about earning a little money like a man. Look at me: I'm one of the fair sex, as fools say, that is, I'm a woman. Haven't I worked like a man for nearly twenty years, supporting a sick husband, and a dozen helpless things I was fond of? I have ideas and an eye for colour, but no genius, and whilst I drudge away for days, copying models, and draperies, and furniture, you dash in a few colours, and turn out a picture that nobody else could have painted but yourself. If I were half as clever as you, I should not only be able to give my poor chicks bread and clothes, but should be able to make ladies of them."

"You are like all women," Perry said; "not having learned algebra, they are always meddling with unknown qualities. Of course you would do as you say if you were me, but then

I am myself, and I do what it is my nature to do."

"Then you will lose Kitty Silver."

Perry's sallow cheeks flushed and he spoke very eagerly :

"Polly, don't speak as if it were my fault. If she returned quite the Kitty of other days, I could paint in a way that would astonish you, I know I could, and I should do it; but I cannot try to do anything without a spur in my side."

"I should think you had a spur in your side—and a pretty sharp one too," Mrs. Cornford said, smiling.

"Do you think, then, that Kitty cares for me, and that she will come back to us?"

Mrs. Cornford went to Perry's tobacco-box, put as much tobacco as would lie on a baby's finger-nail into a bit of gauze paper, and, fixing her eyes on the wall, smoked and thought deliberately. When her modicum of tobacco had come to an end, she said :

"My opinion about Kitty is just this, Perry : you could win her, if you only set about doing it in the right way. You know love isn't lord of all, and a clever woman like Kitty sees more

when she looks through a brick wall than most people do. A lazy bird is contented to catch one fly, but Kitty dives after all she sees ; though you are a silly little fly, ready to jump down her throat, there are so many big ones she wants besides."

"Only tell me what to do, and I'll do it," Perry said, with a desperate inclination to lean upon somebody.

"Firstly," Mrs. Cornford said, "you must have your hair cut, buy a new suit of clothes, and wash your hands. Secondly, you must call upon Kitty, not looking at all as if you were uneasy, you know, but more as if you had found another Kitty elsewhere. Thirdly, you must get one of your friends to invite you to stay at some country-house ; and when installed there, write to Kitty how you are enjoying yourself, *et cetera, et cetera.*"

Perry groaned.

"If Kitty were only contented with me as I am," he said.

"Then you wouldn't care a straw about her. It is just the woman who is discontented with a man, the man always wants to marry. If you

would only fix your affections upon a dear little stupid creature, you would not have far to go. But my model is waiting all this time, and I really cannot talk longer. After all, you'll take your own advice; you can't make a donkey think that anything is better than his thistle."

Mrs. Cornford and her "moddles," as she chose to call them, might alone furnish material for a long story. Some one has written, "in painting you have only to carry on a friendly strife with Nature," but Mrs. Cornford's painting was not of this peaceful and pleasurable kind. She had to contend with all sorts of intractable human tempers, from the beginning of a picture to the end: this model was irritable; that was troubled about a sick sister; one never kept appointments; another, who was a handsome creature, invariably looked ugly when you wanted her to be charming.

Then there were such minor difficulties as these: you want a lovely young creature with golden hair to personate Eve or Venus, but neither in Seven Dials nor in Belgravia are Eves and Venuses as thick as blackberries, and you have to content yourself with hiring the amount

of beauty you want by instalments—getting golden hair here, a pretty complexion there, a fine contour from a third, a beautiful throat and arms from a fourth, and so on. The process is tedious, but the result satisfactory. Mrs. Cornford turned out beautiful things after this fashion, and lost temper less than most people would have done over her models. She rated them soundly for derelictions of duty, though in such a way that none ever took it amiss ; and after extraordinary good behaviour, she rewarded them by cosy cups of tea, or little glasses of *parfait amour*, a proceeding that set her on the pinnacle of favour.

Out of Mrs. Cornford's dingy studio emerged such bright, sweet bits of colour, that they reminded one of beautiful butterflies cradled in dusky cocoons. Fashionable ladies who saw them on the Academy walls, would never guess the history of those apparently fresh creations. "Oh ! what a pretty ear !" "What lovely blue eyes !" "What sweet, babyish dimples !" such fair spectators would say, whilst looking at poor Polly Cornford's laboriously achieved pictures, never dreaming what these pretty ears, and

blue eyes, and babyish dimples, had cost the artist. But Mrs. Cornford made light of all difficulties, fortunately for herself, estimating her own capabilities at their worth. She knew that, much as she had done, she could do far more; that in her especial field she had hardly a rival; that by dint of study and training she might, by-and-by, be judged by the standard applied to men. She knew all this, and worked early and late with a steady purpose one would hardly have expected of her, judging from outward appearances. Her slow movements, portly person, and short, round hands, certainly indicated a phlegmatic temperament; and she was phlegmatic, except where her pictures and her charities were concerned. She was a sort of Miss Burdett Coutts, in her way, and seemed to look upon her earnings as the property of her invalid sister-in-law, her adopted aunts, and her three orphan nieces. Everybody belonging to her was made smart and comfortable with her money. She held herself responsible for the general enjoyment of cakes and ale, never feeling slighted if she got the smallest share. When Kitty had sometimes urged upon her the neces-

sity of buying a new bonnet, she would invariably say, "Oh! I must first think of my chicks!" and though they were not pretty, poetic children, and sometimes vexed her with fits of ingratitude and insubordination, she went on indulging them, and loving them all the same.

CHAPTER X.

A SUNDAY IN THE COUNTRY.

WHAT is there in the whole universe like a Sunday in the country, so aristocratic, so peaceful, so good ? Then, if ever, the wheels of the earth seem resting, and it is possible to fancy an existence without change. The rector and his daughters walk under the arching elms, receiving all the homage of the villagers in their Sunday clothes ; the deaf old clerk stands outside the porch gossiping with his neighbours as they pass ; idle little boys sit till the last moment under the shade, showing each other marbles and pocket-knives ; the bells are ringing in the old sleepy strain ; the surrounding landscape is flecked with passing clouds ; the wild honeysuckle scents the air ; the graves are covered with bright daisies and buttercups.

On the Sunday following Perry's conversation with Mrs. Cornford, he went down into Kent without breathing a word of his intentions to anybody. He was consumed with a desire to see Kitty, and to know his fate, as if fate and Kitty were such simple things that they could be read in a day—nay, an hour! He had no intention of presenting himself at Shelley House, nor even of speaking with Kitty. He said to himself that by seeing her he should be able to know how his chances stood, and that was all he needed.

It was one of those perfect autumn days when all the heavens are purple, and all the earth is golden, and the air is balmier than in June. Perry, who was largely gifted with that exquisite sense of beauty, the artist's second nature, was not so absorbed in his own thoughts as to be blind to these perfections. When he had gone down to Kent a few weeks ago, he was in a childishly irritable mood, that had taken off the edge of his enjoyment; but that mood had passed, leaving an habitual gloom. He felt more than ever at one with Nature now that he was uniformly unhappy, and more than ever con-

scious of outward beauty, finding his own life so barren of it. He was one of those men of real genius, but weak character, who make a goddess of the woman they love.

To Perry, Kitty was indeed a goddess. He considered no woman half so bright, so beautiful, so charming. He matched her with any man he knew for powers of repartee. She made clever puns, she mimicked, she could do anything and everything.

They had spent many a holiday together when she had smiled upon him, and he had never doubted for the future. What holidays were they! Those cheap little trips to Kew, to Greenwich, to Hampstead Heath, could never be excelled, he thought, by the fêtes of Emperors or Sultans. They had been so young, so free from care, so gay, so contented with one another! What did it matter if they had to walk a good deal, and eat twopenny ices, and penny-worth's of cherries, whilst the Upper Ten Thousand dashed past them clad in silk and velvet, and bound to splendid banquets? Kitty had not coveted grandeur, had not even coveted comforts then. She was ready to enjoy any-

thing that came in her way, and accepted his penny bunch of flowers as if it had been a set of diamonds. What could have altered her so much? It was not so very long ago. Perry forgot that women grow old twice as fast as men, and that months had passed since he and Kitty had seriously talked of courtship.

He alighted at the little station, and walked through the quiet lanes, noting the soft greys and purples of the distant hills, and the wonderful glow of the red and yellow woods. He had to traverse one of these woods, and the delicious golden light in which he moved filled him with rapture. Then he came to a broad cart-way that was cut through the trees, and looking across the star-shaped ferns, and the silver stemmed birch, and the bright young pine, he could see a far-off glimpse of the sea. Marking all these things with an artist's eye, he walked briskly towards Shelley House, pausing only when he reached the garden palings.

It was now ten o'clock, and stationing himself where he was pretty sure not to be observed, he waited impatiently. He could hear voices on the lawn.

“Prissy, come in, and be dressed for church! Wattie, have you got my prayer-book?—Miss Silver is ready; come, all of you,” and so on, till the gate opened.

Perry’s heart gave a great leap when he saw Kitty, or what seemed more a semblance of Kitty than Kitty’s self, emerge from the garden. He had often seen her look as bright, as handsome, as bewitching, but he had never seen her look at all as she did now. She wore very quiet colours, his once colour-loving Kitty, and moved along circumspectly, as if she was practising the demeanour of a nun or of a Quakeress. When she spoke to the children, her sentences were carefully expressed, and her words as carefully accentuated. Perry felt that he should have lacked courage to address this calm, cold, dignified lady, in his shabby, not to say vagabondish, attire, even had his mind been made up to do so. But he had set out with a resolution to do nothing for which Kitty should have cause to reproach him; in nowise to spoil her Sunday; not to hurt her position at Shelley House by even a hair’s breadth. The little party had proceeded about a hundred yards when the

gate was thrown open violently, and Dr. Norman came out. Perry drew back a little, and leaped a fence; then he walked on quickly, till he was quite near the whole party, this hedge shielding him from view. Dr. Norman looked quite as much of a Bohemian as Perry, only there was this difference between the two—you saw at a glance that Dr. Norman was an outward Bohemian only because he liked it, and not because necessity compelled. His crumpled coat was of the finest black cloth; his unbuttoned gloves were of the costliest kid; his hat ill-used, but unexceptionable.

Perry scanned him narrowly, and uttered an ejaculation of contempt: “To think that Kitty should care for the society of a man at least twenty years older than herself, and the father of all those children!” Not that he could find it in his mind to despise Dr. Norman utterly. No man is ever so ungenerous to his rival as a woman, and Perry felt obliged to confess that Dr. Norman looked made of very good stuff.

What made him spiteful was the fact of his age. Kitty was too young, too handsome, too

witty, to throw herself away upon a widower between forty and fifty. True, that the idea of a marriage between Kitty and her host was purely the conception of Perry's own brain; but it seemed to him the only natural solution of Kitty's strange conduct. She was not so fond of children, not so fond of humdrum domestic life, as to give up her old love of liberty without some important ultimate end. A wealthy marriage, he thought, would seem such in her eyes, and reasoning from a man's point of view, he blamed Kitty, or any woman, for setting a wealthy marriage above love and freedom. It is an accepted theory that women live in their affections much more than men, but are not men as ready to sacrifice everything to a passion, and readier also to exaggerate the expediency of such sacrifice ?

Whilst Kitty reasoned thus : Of what use for Perry to marry me when poverty will make us so wretched that we shall have no pleasure in each other or in our lives ?—Perry reasoned after quite another fashion. What was money —what was comfort—what was anything in comparison to a happy marriage ?

He crept along the hedge, and listened eagerly to the conversation going on outside. Kitty had turned round to greet Dr. Norman, saying with a smile :

“ Oh, Dr. Norman, how late we shall all be ! And you promised so faithfully to be early for once.”

“ Miss Silver, we must hasten up-hill a little, that is all. Shall I give you an arm ?—and you, Laura ?”

Kitty took one arm, Laura the other, and they walked on briskly.

“ How does Wattie look in his new attire ?” she asked of Dr. Norman ; “ if it had not been for nurse I should have promoted him to knickerbockers long ago.”

“ Miss Silver has made me—oh such big pockets, papa !” Master Wattie cried joyfully, “ and you would never guess what I’ve got in ‘em.” And then he thrust both hands in the beloved pockets and danced before his father.

“ I think, Wattie, Miss Silver is very kind to get you such nice things to wear,” Dr. Norman said ; “ and Laura, too, is promoted to bonnets and long dresses, I see !”

“That reminds me,” said Kitty, “that you have not yet said whether you wish me to accept the invitation to Mrs. Wingfield’s croquet party; Laura is naturally anxious to go.”

“I don’t like Mrs. Wingfield.”

“Then we will give up our party, won’t we, Laura?” Kitty said, with a shade of regret in her voice.

“But my dislike to Mrs. Wingfield is not so strong that I should wish to keep you away,” Dr. Norman put in apologetically. “I don’t want Laura to grow intimate with her, that is all.”

“There need be no intimacy that I see. It is sure to be a crowded party, and Laura will have plenty of her own friends to associate with.”

Then they talked of other things, Kitty being appealed to, Kitty giving her opinion, Kitty throwing herself heart and soul into the family interests, however minute. Perry grew sick with dismay at finding how utterly she could show a demure enthusiasm about people she had not known a few months back. He was half in the mind to hate her for her chameleon-like

power of adaptation, to return to Fulham, and see her face no more. But the habit of a constant and tender nature was too strong. He went on.

By-and-by, they came to a beautiful old church, built on a hill, and Perry forgot all his troubles for a moment or two, intoxicated by the colour of the soft grey walls, the dainty blue sky, and the gorgeous yellow woods below. When his impulse of admiration was over, he saw that Kitty was shaking hands and talking about the weather with the rector and his family : then the two parties poured promiscuously into church, Kitty being treated with great respect by everybody, the old sexton pulling his forelock to her, the school-children dropping a curtsey, the shopkeepers' wives bowing deferentially.

The bell chimed a little longer, as if giving grace to a lame old man toiling up the hill ; then ceased, and everybody was listening to the rector's voice but Perry. He emerged from his hiding-place now, and, after sitting on a grave-stone for half an hour in sullen contemplation, took out his sketch-book and portable paint-box,

and consoled himself by working a little masterpiece of colour. Then he began to feel childishly hungry, and descending to the village, feasted on bread and cheese and ale in a snug little wayside inn. Sitting in the clean-sanded parlour, he took out a leaf from his sketch-book, and wrote in pencil :

“ KITTY,—I have been near you to-day, when you little knew it. A hundred and one things tell me that you are gradually forgetting me and the life you did not always despise. I shall never be famous or rich, I daresay, so I have no right to blame you for choosing as you have done. But I am afraid I shall always love you.

“ P. N.

“ P.S.—Be happy ; never mind me.”

Kitty received that letter as she was tying on Prissy’s pinafore for lunch. A little lad came running across the lawn with it, and Dr. Norman, who was at the window, handed it to her. Poor Kitty could not help colouring a little, especially as Dr. Norman, she thought, looked

curious. She said something about an old friend passing through the village, and not liking to call because it was Sunday. Immediately Miss Prissy choose to open her round eyes and ask :

“ Was it Mr. Neeve, who played with us so nicely ? ”

Kitty was very angry : that visit of Perry’s had brought so many embarrassments with it, and now he must write ! She dared not speak a lie before Dr. Norman, but said “ yes,” looking frankly at him as she spoke. He checked Prissy’s inquisitiveness in a way that made Kitty part pleased, part puzzled. Did he guess her secret ? Did he feel angry with her for having a secret ? She could not tell.

CHAPTER XI. .

KITTY'S DREAMS.

PERRY'S letter disturbed Kitty's peace for many days. She wrote off to him the very afternoon she received it, and reproached him for his want of faith in her. When she had been sufficiently caustic on this head, she took a soft, womanly, cajoling tone, called him her dear, dearest Perry, her best friend in the world, her consolation through all the troubles of the day; and when she had, as she thought, given expression to the true state of her heart, she let her brains have full play, and reasoned with him as she had done of old. Why was he, why were all men so hard upon women, expecting fine feelings and unlimited sacrifices instead of a deliberate line of conduct—reasoned out as men reasoned out their own conduct where im-

portant affairs were concerned? Why was it looked upon as selfish and heartless of a woman to be politic, when a man was considered a fool if he were not? You will say, she said, that it is merely a question of affection between you and me, but it is more than that. I care for you more than for anybody in the whole world, and shall marry you, or not at all. It is not worth while to say more about the matter. Meantime, am I wrong in doing all that I can to improve my position? If I marry you, it is better that your wife should bring a respectable connection, though she can bring you no money. If I never marry you, who will find me home and shelter, and all that a woman wants? Dear Perry, is there nothing I can say that will convince you it is more wise than worldly of me to reason and act thus, and more foolish than unkind of you to blame me for so doing? Kitty had profited by Laura's masters during the last few weeks, and could write a much more telling letter now. It is quite wonderful what brains will do for a woman. Kitty had picked up an education of some sort in Bohemia; could play waltzes, strum the guitar, and dance to perfec-

tion, make bonnets like a milliner, knew a little smattering of French and German, and how to make the utmost of dull people. She improved upon these accomplishments now, practised on the old grand piano when Dr. Norman was out and the children at play, worked at French grammar and sang duets with Laura, hired a guitar and, throwing the pink ribbon across her shoulders, delighted the quiet people who came to tea with sparkling little tunes.

Kitty, you see, worked very hard; and if she sometimes shut herself up in her room and cried from utter weariness, who can wonder? Nothing is a greater strain upon the nervous system than persistent self-denial, and Kitty denied herself from morning till night. She denied herself in little things and in great, for the sake of winning people's affections, and obtaining from them all the good things the Fates had denied her. Do you suppose there were not other occupations she preferred to that of dressing Prissy's dolls, or playing at everlasting cat's cradle with Wattie? Do you suppose she liked counting up laundress's bills, and seeing that Wattie did his sums, to the pleasant sound

of a scratching slate-pencil and dry sponge wiping out wrong figures? Often and often she sighed for the delicious indolence of the old life, the sleepy Sunday afternoons, the little fêtes got up at a moment's notice, and so wonderfully sumptuous, at nobody's apparent expense; the sherry-cobbler for which nobody ever seemed responsible, the free and easy intercourse, the utter exemption from grave thoughts or care—all these things Kitty dreamed of and sighed for in her solitude. But she had put her hand to the plough, and was determined not to look back. She considered life as a game of cards, and said to herself that she would make the best of her hand.

Once or twice Dr. Norman noticed her pale looks kindly, ordered up some of his old Madeira for her, watched her, absent as he was, to see whether she ate or drank, pressed her to let Laura drive her out every day, and, in other ways, took the same sort of care that her father might have done. Kitty would sometimes review all these little acts of consideration, one by one; but she could never come to the conclusion that they were more than acts of

consideration. She thought of her admirers in the old days; their name was Legion, and hardly a day passed but from one or the other had come a flower, a box of bonbons, or a compliment. All that was over now, and, for compensation, she had the circumspect thanks of a grave widower for services rendered to his children. There was a little gaiety for poor Kitty, nevertheless. Mrs. Wingfield, the neighbour of whom across the hedge Perry heard some talk, was continually giving parties, and inviting the whole Norman family. Dr. Norman, it will be remembered, had expressed a dislike to this lady, and it needed Kitty's most skilful handling to carry her point, and at the same time to appear indifferent about it. The matter had unfortunately been brought up again before the answer was sent off.

“Do you really care much about going, Laura?” Dr. Norman asked; whereupon Laura looked at Kitty, and, seeing her answer in Kitty's eyes, said “Yes.”

“And do you care about it, Miss Silver?”

“If Laura likes it, of course,” artfully answered Kitty; and Dr. Norman said no more.

The party was a superb one. Mrs. Wingfield was the widow of a rich cotton-planter of Ceylon. She was one of those soft-looking, round-eyed, low-voiced things who pass off for having little or no character, whilst in reality they bend every will to their own; and who equally pass off for having no passion, whilst Cleopatra was not more fiery in love or hate than they can be.

Mrs. Wingfield wanted some one or something to be fiery about. She loved her dogs, and they adored her. But the affection of dogs is an equable thing, not nearly so subject to caprice nor so apt to run into excitement as friendship. She had not loved her husband much, and she was not the sort of woman to make friends of men—only the nobler kind do that—and she did not care for the homage of fools. So she had lived very much alone hitherto, and, finding Kitty on the alert to be sympathetic, seized upon her as a jewel, determining to buy the jewel at any price. It was a case of elective affinity. The one had all sorts of gifts that the other wanted—wealth, and the captivating emanations of wealth, such as rich dress, servants, equipage,

etc. The other had spirit, beauty (for a falser theory than that mere beauty makes a woman enemies among her own sex never was started), and every quality of character most valuable to society. So after a little preliminary friendliness, Mrs. Wingfield said imploringly, "Miss Silver, having dilly-dilly-dilly'd all the ducks to drink, how can I make them swim about and enjoy themselves?"

"Have you croquet?"

"Oh, yes! croquet, and bowls, and all that sort of thing; but the difficulty is to make a set of stupid people look as if they liked doing anything."

"Shall I see what I can do?"

"If you would."

Kitty was off in a twinkling, and managed the set of stupid people beautifully. Soon the lawn resounded with the echo of croquet balls and animated voices, and everybody seemed amused. A trio of somewhat stiff old ladies Kitty was herself amusing. Mrs. Wingfield looked on, in her supremely indolent way, and thought Kitty an angel. She could do nothing herself; she loved people who did things for her.

Before the afternoon was over, a brisk little intimacy had sprung up between Mrs. Wingfield and her visitor. Kitty was by far the most dignified about it, but jumped to friendly conclusions quite as fast.

“ You will come up and see me often, won’t you ? ” asked Mrs. Wingfield, in quite an affectionate manner ; and Kitty, of course, said yes. It was a great comfort to her that, Mrs. Wingfield being rich and of accepted position, did not in the least disturb herself about her own. It sufficed for Mrs. Wingfield that Kitty was clever, and willing to use her cleverness on other people’s behalf.

“ Isn’t it a little dull for you at Shelley House ? ” continued Mrs. Wingfield, *sotto voce* ; “ Dr. Norman is such a strange, unsociable sort of animal, I can’t imagine how you can stay.”

Kitty, knowing Mrs. Wingfield to be rich and independent, thought it more expedient to be frank with her. She broke into a little self-pitying laugh, and replied : “ A penniless lass with a long pedigree, dear Mrs. Wingfield, is not overwhelmed with invitations to wealthy houses.

Better be a guest of Dr. Norman's than a governess elsewhere."

"Go out with me to India. I would marry you to ten thousand a-year."

"Very well," said Kitty, affecting to treat the matter seriously. "When do you want me to be ready?"

"Perhaps in a week. I hate England the more I see of it, and one gets starved without good curry and chutney. Then, the servants here are so impertinent. Give me a dozen black boys, and I should be quite independent of all your fashionable cooks and ladies'-maids. Have you seen my black man, Tom-tom?—he's such a darling."

Mrs. Wingfield went on vaguely, Kitty putting in a polite "yes" now and then; whilst her mind had shot as far ahead of the other's talk as a child's kite soars from the tiny hand holding it. If other things failed, why should she mind going to India? It was not for her to pick and choose her way in the world, she must just follow the first hand that beckoned. She took great care, therefore, to please Mrs. Wingfield in small, almost infinitesimal ways; for

Kitty was on principle a moral homœopath, dosing her patients sparsely and according to the fibre of constitution. Mrs. Wingfield was not one of those persons who digest the coarser kinds of flattery; but there are other and subtler ways of worshipping people than by the lips. Kitty knew better than any one how to make a little action mean a good deal. She could fetch Mrs. Wingfield's shawl unbidden, and put it round her shoulders in a way that made everybody feel that their hostess was a queen. She could admire Mrs. Wingfield's jewelry or person a little way off, apparently quite unconscious that what she said, was heard. Does any one blame Kitty Silver for these little artifices? Does any one despise her for them? Very likely; but remember that she was not born with a golden spoon in her mouth, and was born with a strong longing for golden spoons. It is very unfortunate to be born with such a longing. It tempts one to do many questionable things. But it requires more moral strength than Kitty possessed to keep from doing these things. She did not pride herself upon doing them; she went through the work of the day

with a resolute spirit, and shut her senses to the disagreeable part of it. She had no support from without, no clanship to fall back upon, no wealthy uncles or aunts to make her their heir. Was she wrong in building up her fortunes as she could, picking up a brick here, a bit of mortar there, never looking too closely to see if any mud were sticking to it? She did not always blame herself.

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CHAPTER XII.

KITTY'S CHRISTMAS.

THE first bright dry days of autumn came and went; then the cold white mists of November lay about the bare black woods, and the country was very dreary. Kitty used to take long walks with the children, shivering from head to foot, and ready to cry of discomfort. Winter to her had hitherto meant something cheerful, indolent, and luxurious. In Paradise Place, as soon as the first snows came, one large fire used to be kept up in the house and everybody spent the most part of the day near it. Neither Perry nor Mrs. Cornford ever worked much in cold weather; and after half an hour's zealous endurance of their freezing studios, they would come to the fire, and respectively cook, darn, sketch, and read French novels in company. The little

girls squatted on the floor, and took a stray lesson in something or other—perspective, partsinging, French, or elocution, as the case might be. Kitty had an arm-chair and an amusing book to read; one or two of Perry's friends looked in for a chat, and the winter's day, which began for them between ten and eleven in the morning, ended tolerably early at night.

At Shelley House, the winter day seemed interminable. Dr. Norman liked the children to be up early, and Kitty had to rise ere it was fairly light, and go through the long process of dressing, so as to be down by a little past eight o'clock. She had a fire in her bedroom; but Shelley House was spacious and cold, and she often contrasted it regretfully with the warm dingy little home at Fulham. After breakfast came the daily governess and lessons, the long monotonous walk, then lunch, needlework, and the six o'clock dinner. Dinner was not so dull, because Dr. Norman would be present, but he had grown less sociable during the last few weeks, and looked as if in trouble, Kitty thought. There was one milestone to break this dull road, namely, Mrs. Wingfield's increasing friendliness. Mrs.

Wingfield tried hard to persuade Kitty to spend Christmas with her, and Kitty would have liked it, but the bare proposition brought a Round Robin of deprecations, to which she yielded at once. Kitty had dined occasionally with her new friend, and that she found delightful. The party consisted of two or three of Mrs. Wingfield's Indian friends only ; there was no Laura present to keep down the amusing gossip of Indian life ; the meats and drinks were superb, the men pleasant and worldly, and everything just as Kitty liked it. How she wished Perry had been there ! she could have flirted with him, and no one would have seen the harm. Mrs. Wingfield and Kitty had grown intimate to such a point now, that they called each other Myra and Kitty. Myra had told Kitty her secrets, Kitty sitting at her feet all the while. On the occasion of the last little dinner, Myra had presented her with a very costly brooch, whispering, as she slipped it into her hand, "I will give you something much more beautiful, if you will go to Calcutta with me," and Kitty crimsoned pleasurabley, all sorts of visions floating before her mind.

She naturally shewed the brooch to the children, and the story of it reached Dr. Norman's ears. He listened more inquisitively than the occasion would seem to warrant; even asked to see the brooch, turned it over in a speculative way, then returned it, saying :

“Mrs. Wingfield is certainly very lavish in her gifts.”

Kitty kept her temper, but it provoked her that Dr. Norman, who never gave her anything, should seem to grudge her acceptance of so beautiful a gift.

“You don't like Mrs. Wingfield, I know,” she said, “and that is why I did not show you her gift at first.”

He looked as if bound to explain himself, but the children were present, and it was impossible for him to abuse Kitty's friends in their hearing. The first time he found her alone, he went back to the subject.

“I cannot honestly say that I know any harm of Mrs. Wingfield,” he said, “nor have I had much opportunity of knowing her; but the little I have seen, I do not like: she seems to me a person of thoroughly ill-regulated mind.”

Kitty smiled.

"Oh! Dr. Norman, I have an ill-regulated mind myself. Why should I want perfection in my friends?"

"Is she really your friend?"

"She is so kind to me, I can hardly feel as if she were not, though we see very little of each other. I have avoided going oftener, because you objected to it."

"Thank you," Dr. Norman said. "Mrs. Wingfield is not wise in her choice of friends, from all that I have heard; though, as far as social position goes, they are everything one could desire; but that is not all. A high moral and intellectual tone is much more important."

"Mrs. Wingfield and her friends are all reading people," Kitty said.

"Oh! what is that a sign of? Reading to kill time is a mere vicious amusement."

Kitty looked hurt, and Dr. Norman hastened to qualify his speech.

"Of course I can only speak from a very partial experience, and I ask your pardon if I have

been unfair to your friend. One is apt to get crabbed if left to oneself. I know that my house is a dull one——”

“Oh, no!” began Kitty.

“Dull for you at least,” he went on, “as the children are too young to be companions, and I too old and too careworn.”

He said this with a little sigh.

“It is not want of companionship that drives me to Mrs. Wingfield’s house, I assure you. It is because she is so kind to me, and is always wanting me to be with her.”

“Could not you and Laura get up some small evening parties amongst the neighbours, by way of amusing yourselves? Pray understand that I wish you to do exactly as you like in that respect.”

“You are very kind.”

“And do not hesitate to ask down any relative or friend of your own, if you wish it. The house is so large that there is plenty of room, even if Regy comes home.”

Kitty caught up the last words, “If Regy comes home,” and looked inquisitive. Dr. Norman explained the matter hastily. The boy had

been invited to stay with friends, and he should urge him to do so."

"There is too much noise in the house when Regy is at home," he added; "I don't know how to support it;" and with this he went.

This explanation by no means satisfied Kitty. She did not care much about Regy's coming home, but she felt that Dr. Norman had not given her a full explanation of the matter, and it puzzled her. Had Regy been getting into debt, or into any other scrape? Had Dr. Norman any idea of his having made love to her?

Two or three days passed and Regy's name was not mentioned; till one morning Dr. Norman said that Regy had been invited to spend Christmas with some friends, and that he had accepted the invitation. Amongst the young people there was natural lamentation at this news; but Kitty talked of the Christmas-tree, of the dance to follow, and of other bright things in prospect, so that the cloud was a transient one. She set to work about these festivities with no very light heart. It is not easy to live vicariously, and that is what she was trying to do. What part and lot had she

with these gay young things? still less, what part and lot had she with a studious unsociable man like Dr. Norman? With Mrs. Wingfield she felt at ease, but it was more than ever difficult for her to see her now. She never accepted an invitation to go there without some sort of discussion with Dr. Norman beforehand; at times he would be hurt, at others irritated, never indifferent, and yet she went. It seemed so hard to give up the only gaiety that came in her way, and Mrs. Wingfield might prove a very useful friend. She once hinted this to Dr. Norman, but he would not see her meaning, and stuck to his text—Mrs. Wingfield was not a person to be intimate with. Kitty thought it a little unamiable of Dr. Norman to say this, with the evident intention of keeping her away. She tried to serve two masters, yielding apparently to Dr. Norman's wishes, and all the while growing more intimate with Mrs. Winfield.

Serving two masters is desperate work. Brains and nervous power wear away at a terrible rate under the unnatural tension imposed upon them, and one is almost sure to lose the game in the end.

A day or two before Christmas, she lunched with Mrs. Wingfield ; it was a pleasant thing to do. Mrs. Wingfield was the quintessence of hospitality, and could, moreover, be very entertaining when alone with a friend. Kitty felt herself, for the time, the Kitty of old. She laughed, said smart things, made amusing commentaries on Mrs. Wingfield's stories, and was altogether delightful.

Fortunately a snow-storm came on.

"I shall keep you till to-morrow," Mrs. Wingfield said. "Oh, how nice that will be ! Sit down, darling, in that arm-chair, put your feet on a footstool, and when we have each had just one little bit of sleep, we'll be entertaining again."

Kitty obeyed, and both ladies nodded and napped till it grew dusk, and tea was brought in ; then they sat sipping it over the fire, in a luxury of growing confidence.

"I will tell you what I have been thinking of," Mrs. Wingfield said, after a little pause, and looking straight into Kitty's face as she spoke. "I do so sicken of living alone. I want some one to be fond of me, and help me to scold the

servants and to choose my dresses. I should like to have you in my house always. Do you say Yes or No, Kitty?"

Kitty's heart beat fast, but she controlled herself and spoke quite collectedly.

"Dear Myra!" she said, with a little surprised laugh, "how can one say Yes or No in a minute to such a proposal as that? It takes one's breath away, like an offer of marriage."

"But if you had an offer of marriage you would say Yes or No at once. Women's opinions are always formed on some things."

Kitty took her friend's hand and pressed it gratefully.

"It is not myself I am considering," she said, "but others."

"What others?" Mrs. Wingfield asked.

Kitty mentioned the Normans as first claimants upon her; then she talked very vaguely of old friends and connections at home—in Fulham.

"I have two homes and two families," she added, "and it would be difficult for me to break entirely from either. But I am grateful, dear Myra, and I should like to come to you better than anything. I should, indeed."

"How nice it would be! oh, how nice it would be!" Myra went on. "I would take you up to London with me for the season; I would be exactly to you as an elder sister; and if you married, I would give you a superb wedding breakfast."

Kitty kissed her friend in a tender deprecating way, as if such goodness were quite too much for her.

"You hesitate?" Mrs. Wingfield said.

"Yes, I hesitate," Kitty answered; "and I have not the courage to tell you why."

"You are too proud to accept anything from me."

"I need not be very proud to shrink from accepting so much," Kitty answered; and then, still holding the tips of Myra's fingers, she made a long speech.

"You see, dearest Myra," she said, "that I am a very weak-minded creature, and should never be able to support the humiliation of being a poor church-mouse in a rich household. I should always be comparing myself to you, a tatterdemalion to a princess, and you would not like to feel, that you were continually humili-

ating your friend in the eyes of the world. I am of good but poor family, and not one of my relations can help me to support the social position to which I was born. I have hardly any income. Dear Myra, how can I come to you so? If you were old, and disagreeable, and ugly, I would be to you as a kind of companion."

"I would give you a hundred a year to-morrow," interrupted Mrs. Wingfield, "if you would come so now," snapping somewhat coarsely the silken thread of Kitty's sentimental discourse. "No one need know what arrangements we two make; I'll call you my cousin."

Kitty began to speak; then stopped, smiled hesitatingly, and finally said, with a sudden charming frankness:

"After all, Myra, I do love you, and I think if you gave me a left-off dress I would wear it for your sake."

"I would give you lots of new dresses," interrupted Mrs. Wingfield.

Kitty went on:

"Suppose, dearest, that I do come to live with you; I must keep up the appearance of a

lady, in order not to shame my friend ; if I consented to be your butler, housekeeper, accountant—anything but companion, need our affections suffer because I accept wages in exchange ? You know I must go out as governess when I leave Shelley House, or earn my living somehow.”

“Do, do come to me,” urged Mrs. Wingfield ; “it would be so much nicer than teaching for you, and nicer than anything for me.” And the two ladies talked and talked till dinner-time, and Dr. Norman’s carriage, which had come to fetch Kitty, was sent away in order that they might talk a little more, and ere bed-time came, it was all settled.

“There is one last thing I have to ask of you,” Kitty said, as the two parted in Mrs. Wingfield’s dressing-room. “Let us keep our own counsel for the next few days. Dr. Norman is a great deal worried just now ; Clevy is home, and makes the children so noisy, and I am sure he would be greatly distressed at the bare mention of my leaving—”

“Being in love with you.”

Kitty ignored the idea with a very great deal

of composure, and added: "It is a compact, isn't it, Myra ?"

Whereupon, Myra, who was getting sleepy, nodded in token of affirmation, gave Tom-tom, who slept outside her door, a little admonitory kick, which meant that he was to close the corridor and put out the lights; and then went off to bed, very satisfied with the turn affairs had taken. Kitty did not sleep much that night. Having made up her mind, she could not lay her head down on the pillow and sleep till the dawn, child-wise. She had not calculated upon any change of fortune coming so suddenly. A hundred a year and a home of ease seemed very great things to her; and she thought she could not be wrong in accepting them for a time. Kitty tacked this proviso to everything.

She would fain have become a fashionable lady, and lived after the manner of Mrs. Wingfield; she would fain have married for love, and made Perry happy; she would fain have staid with the Normans and made them happy too. How was she to choose the right casket?

It is true that she had consented, after great

persuasion, to accept something in the shape of a salary from Dr. Norman when it was arranged that she should stay as companion to his children, But how different it would be to live with Myra !

CHAPTER XIII.

KITTY'S CHRISTMAS CONTINUED.

THE children's party occupied Kitty's time and thoughts so entirely next day, that she had no opportunity of dwelling upon her own affairs. She shut herself up for one quarter of an hour; but it was quite impossible to clear her thoughts, and resolve upon the best means of breaking her news to Dr. Norman. He was so helpless, and she so helpful, that she knew he would set himself strongly against her taking such a step. And what then?

She went downstairs, and acted the part of hostess to thirty children perfectly, though she was wishing herself anywhere else.

It disappointed her a little that Dr. Norman had placed no gift for her on the Christmas-tree. A silver thimble would have seemed graci-

ous coming from him at such a time, or a six-penny neck-ribbon. There was nothing, and yet Dr. Norman accepted the slippers she had worked for him, as if a gift from her was natural and pleasant. The children all screamed out in a breath: "Oh, papa! have you nothing for Kitty?" but he changed the subject—a little awkwardly, Kitty thought. When all the young folks had gone, and even Laura's anxiety to help her friend had succumbed in the extreme of drowsiness, Dr. Norman peeped into the drawing-room.

What a scene it was! The chairs were lying about in rows, like files of infantry under fire; the tables were overturned, and choked up with shot and shell; in other words, balls, and toys of every description; the old square piano might be called the Hougomont of this domestic Waterloo, being barricaded to the summit with every available piece of furniture. Kitty moved amid the scene of destruction like an emblematic figure of peace. She had not been torn to pieces during Blindman's Buff; she had lost neither life nor limb in the fray of Hunt the Slipper. Her hair was smooth and bright, her

pretty dress in no degree disordered, her movements slow and calm.

She did not know that Dr. Norman was looking at her, and went her way, picking up Prissy's sash here, Laura's necklace there, with so womanly, nay, motherly, a care, that his eyes filled. He thought of his dead wife, and of the way in which she used to care for their children, thus from morning till night. It seemed to him that any woman who so loved his children must be good, and tender, and true. On a sudden, Kitty looked up.

“These children, oh these children!” she said laughing. “It's a mercy we've a roof left to sleep under, Dr. Norman.”

“You ought to be asleep now,” he answered; “how tired you look!”

She shut her eyes, and yawned, a very pretty little yawn, admitting that she was sleepy, adding: “Christmas Eve comes only once a year.”

Dr. Norman again pressed her to go to bed, holding out his hand as he said good-night. It was a very cold little hand that she gave him, and he saw that the fire was out.

"Oh, Miss Silver!" he cried in dismay, "this is too bad of you. What shall we all do if you are ill? Come into my study and get warm before going up stairs. I have a fire there."

She felt cold, and followed him to the study, willingly. He put her in an arm-chair, made her drink a glass of wine, and, sitting opposite to her, talked of many things, in a friendly confidential way. Kitty's old liking for Dr. Norman came back again. He had seemed distant and self-absorbed of late, and she fancied that he was losing interest in her. But on this Christmas Eve he showed himself so alive to her comfort in small things, so chivalrously courteous, and so evidently pleased to be near her, that she felt as if she should never have courage to tell him her resolve. When she had said good-night, and Dr. Norman was left alone, he fell into a long train of thought. He had been trying for weeks past to make up his mind on a very important point, and the deliberation filled every leisure hour.

Should he marry Kitty?

He was not in love with her, she was not in love with him; but they liked each other, and

there were a hundred interests to bring them nearer, if he gave her his name. His first marriage had been perfect ; he did not expect a second to be like it ; but there could be degrees of domestic happiness, and he thought that Kitty would make him happier than any other woman he knew. She seemed very lonely ; she had no fortune ; he felt a man's sense of protectiveness urging him to take her to his heart, and keep the world from being unkind to her evermore. Had Kitty been a coquette, impulsive, of a more demonstrative nature, he would have lacked courage to marry her ; but she was so calm, so even-tempered, so tender to the children, that he felt he should be running no risk for himself. It is natural for a man to think women happier when married. Dr. Norman, though by no means an egotist, never feared that it could be a great risk for Kitty. True, she was young and he was middle-aged ; but how many young girls do marry men double their years, and are happy !

Then Dr. Norman thought of his children one at a time, and of the probable influence his second marriage would have upon them. He

smiled as he recalled Regy's fancied passion, for Dr. Norman had naturally heard rumours of this—thinking, what will poor foolish Regy say to me for having forestalled him? But he reflected that Regy would be very little at home for the next few years, and, even if he were, could but be better off for having Kitty to take a motherly and sisterly care of him. With regard to Laura, Dr. Norman had no misgivings. Laura adored Kitty, and was of so gentle and relying a nature that, without some one strong to lean upon, she would be utterly lost. Kitty was strong, and Kitty was staunch. Laura would be infinitely happier for having Kitty's guidance always; Clevy and Wattie wanted a mother sadly; and though he doubted whether his passionate, petted little Prissy would ever yield to Kitty the allegiance which would be her due, he felt that Prissy needed her care more than any of his children. Then Dr. Norman thought of himself. He was a very lonely man, and he was forty-five. Could he support such loneliness always? Would it not be better for him to drink the pleasant cup held to his lips rather than weep for ever for the wine

spilled on the ground that could never be drunk any more? The perfect happiness of his first marriage made him shrink from marrying again; but he was wearying and sickening of solitude.

How could these children ever fill it? The boys would no sooner be grown to men than they were sure to make homes for themselves; the girls might stay with him longer; but what had Laura and he in common, much as they loved one another? Prissy had much more character, and he felt that Prissy would grow up like her mother; but she was a child at present, and it would be years before she could at all complete his life; and what might not those intervening years bring forth? Lastly, there was the consideration of Kitty's social position. He knew nothing of her family. Was it desirable to give this lady his name till he had learned a little about her own? And then he laughed at himself for the foolish thought. What did it matter to him about Kitty's social position? If she were not of herself good enough to be his wife, no lineage could render her so. Finally, he determined that Kitty Silver should be his wife.

Christmas-day at Shelley House was like Christmas-day anywhere else. To see the way in which Kitty went through the day's business was quite marvellous; one could have sworn that she had made up Christmas parcels for the poor, had decorated churches with holly, had presented Sunday-school children with cakes and clothing and pretty speeches, had ordered Christmas feasts for the servants' hall, all her life. Her power of adapting herself to circumstances was really unusual, and she was ever a little enthusiastic, as if school children's cakes and servants' feasts were dear to her heart. When the business of the day had been gone through, she stole up to her bed-room, which Laura had turned into quite a pretty boudoir for her darling Miss Silver, and, drawing an easy chair to the fire, began to think. Ought she not tell Perry? ought she not tell Dr. Norman, of the resolution she had taken? She felt as if she should cry of regret at leaving Shelley House; but she never hesitated about leaving it.

If she only had strength of mind enough to go and tell Dr. Norman at once! She knew that he had gone to his study in order to get a little

quiet, and she had often joined him there to consult him on important domestic matters. Why should she not go now? She rose, walked to the door, turned the handle, then paused irresolute. It was so pleasant to keep by her cosy fire, and not have to talk of painful things. She would tell Dr. Norman to-morrow. Then she got angry with herself for being so irresolute, and, opening the door quickly, went straight downstairs. Dr. Norman's study was shut off from the entrance-hall by a corridor closed by baize doors at each end. Kitty found the first open, and the second was opened by Dr. Norman as she touched the handle.

"I was coming to say something to you," she said, with a little sinking of the heart.

"And I was coming to say something to you," he said, smiling. "Will you sit down by the fire?"

Kitty obeyed, and Dr. Norman sat down opposite to her. They occupied the same seats they had done the night before, but were far from being able to affect the same friendly tone.

After a long pause Dr. Norman said: "I think you were coming to say something to me?"

Kitty felt all her self-possession going.

"It is nothing very important," she answered.

"Would you mind speaking first?"

Had the question been put to Kitty, she would never have confessed to an anticipation of Dr. Norman's purpose; yet it is doubtful whether any woman would not have guessed as much. Being thus appealed to, Dr. Norman felt it incumbent upon him to speak.

"Dear Miss Silver," he said, "I have been wondering for some time past what we should all do at Shelley without you, and I want to persuade you to stay altogether."

Then he took courage, and added, "Could you marry me?"

Kitty smiled and blushed, and had not a word to say. It was so natural for her to do what she knew would please others, that for the life of her she could not have shook her head and run away. Moreover, the mere putting of the thought into words seemed to make it just possible. There was silence for a minute or two, and during that time a hundred things passed through the girl's mind.

It was true that something like an engage-

ment existed between Perry and herself, but she had never allowed him to look upon such a state of things as irrevocable. She was always tacking conditions to the consummation of their engagement, and the fault rested with him alone if he regarded it in any other light. And after all, fond as she was of Perry, he was so visionary, so childishly unreliable, so incapable of carrying out a resolution, that she felt sure he would never make a position for himself. What right, therefore, had he to expect her to marry him? She liked him—poor Perry—better than any one in the world, but of what use for two people to like each other, if they have not bread to eat? Then she thought of the promise given to Mrs. Wingfield: but that was surely less binding upon her than the one she had given to Perry—you cannot be sued in a court of justice for the non-fulfilment of a visit to a friend; and if a hasty compact such as she and Mrs. Wingfield had made were, indeed, final, what numbers of broken compacts there would be in life, and how miserable life would be! Kitty felt that, if once her future were assured, she should be a happier and a better woman; and here was

Dr. Norman ready to assure her a future, and make her so !

All the time she was thinking these thoughts, Dr. Norman waited, not in passionate suspense, as a younger lover might, but with very natural anxiety as to whether, having calmly played for a very high stake, he should win or lose. He liked Kitty all the better for this modest hesitation, and he felt that it would seem very hard to take her refusal.

“ Well ?” he said, smiling at her.

Kitty put her pretty white hands under her chin, and looked into the fire.

“ It is so hard to say either Yes or No when we say it for life,” she said, half crying.

And then Dr. Norman gently asked if he had not better decide for her, which he did in a way entirely satisfactory to himself.

CHAPTER XIV.

A DILEMMA.

HOW was she to tell Perry? How was she to tell Myra? How was she to tell Dr. Norman that she had to break faith with these two in marrying him.

Poor Kitty found herself in one of those hopelessly perplexing situations which defy counsel, even supposing counsel to be at hand. She wanted to make Perry happy; she wanted to become a fashionable lady, and live with Mrs. Wingfield; she wanted to marry a good man like Dr. Norman, and devote herself to him and to his children all her life. But she could not do these three things, and she had chosen one of the three. Was her choice a wise one, and was it irrevocable? She could not bear to think that it was—much as she liked Dr. Norman, she could not bear to think that.

On first coming from Dr. Norman's study, with his kiss fresh upon her lips, and his frank words of affection and trust still sounding in her ears, she was on the point of writing a decisive letter to Perry, and another decisive letter to Myra ; but when she sat down and took pen in hand, resolve and inclination were alike gone. For more than an hour she thought and thought and thought, without being able to come to any conclusion. Well, her promise to Dr. Norman was not yet a day old, and there would surely be time and opportunity given her for deliberation. She must put it off till another day. So she dressed herself very carefully for the festive Christmas tea, wearing a new dress, and all the trinkets that Perry had ever given her, and went downstairs, not looking in the least like a person in deep perplexity.

After the tea, which was a very sumptuous, one, and served in the servants' hall, Dr. Norman drew his chair beside Kitty's, and watched the dancing with a smile on his face. Kitty looked bright too ; it was so natural to her to look bright when she thought a bright look would appear grateful to others ; besides which, she was

pleased that Dr. Norman should give up his evening's work for her. He seemed quite indifferent as to whether a domestic comment should be passed upon his conduct or no ; he was so frank by nature that it was impossible for him to modify his actions merely to suit other people, and Kitty liked him all the better for possessing a virtue which she almost regarded as a weakness.

“ You have hitherto lived among artists, and people of talent,” he said to her as they both looked on, “ and must have led a life of perpetual variety and amusement. Are you quite sure that you do not find this dull ? ”

“ It is so peaceful,” Kitty said, “ and peace is better than pleasure. I could not bear to live always in poverty.”

Dr. Norman's face clouded for a moment.

“ I am not rich, and there are all the children to educate,” he answered, uneasily. “ I rank as a poor man among my friends and neighbours.”

“ Oh ! Dr. Norman, you don't know what it is to be poor ! Why, I have known very nice clever people who have dined off dry bread

many a time ;" and Kitty laughed, half sad, half merry.

" We shall not be so poor as that, Kitty," Dr. Norman went on—it was the first time he had so called her—" and you have shown yourself so good and so clever that I know everything will go well in the house where you are at the head of it. Thank God, all the children love you. I would, on no account, have sacrificed my happiness, to theirs; but it has been as much almost for their sake as for mine that I have longed for you to become one of us."

All this was very practical, and yet Kitty found it pleasant. She had lived in the world too early and too long to entertain the ordinary feminine notion about love and marriage. To have Dr. Norman sitting by her side and discussing the future, as if they were friends of years' standing, was much more agreeable to her than any lover's platitudes would have been. Regy's love-making had moved her because he was young and eager, and she liked him; but she felt that she liked Dr. Norman best, kind, considerate, and tender as he ever was, and as free from passion as herself.

Whilst Kitty was thinking these thoughts, Dr. Norman was thinking how easy it would be to fall in love again, and how much more attractive Kitty had seemed since consenting to become his wife. He had always thought her handsome; but now he was always thinking of her as being handsome. What woman had such eyes, such vivacious expression, such shining hair, such graces of movement? He longed to know her better; to have her call him by his Christian name; to have *tête-à-tête* talks about common things between them; to feel that nothing could come in the way of his new, happier life. He had not yet asked Kitty when she would marry him; but he saw no reason she could have for delay, and he determined to tell his children of his coming marriage as soon as the time should be fixed for it.

Kitty's thoughts were less satisfactory. How should she tell Perry? How should she tell Mrs. Wingfield? What would they think of her? Hoping for some miraculous piece of good fortune that should render her course easier by-and-by, she went to bed, and slept serenely.

A week passed without any miraculous piece

of good fortune. Every day Kitty had risen from her bed with the thought, "I will really free myself from my burdens before night;" but night had come, and she bore her burdens still. One morning's post brought a wild note from Perry. He had torn out a leaf from his sketch-book, and had written across it, amid suggestive dashes of orange and purple and crimson, a snatch or two of Byronic, but none the less sincere, declaration. This did not help poor Kitty.

Another day, came a most coaxing but vehement letter from Myra. Myra must have her friend at once,—at once. Her room was ready, numerous plans were formed for her pleasure; they were going up to London for the season, and afterwards to travel abroad. And this did not help Kitty.

She drew up the blinds on that New Year's morning, and looked drearily across the white fields. "How glad I shall be when the snow is gone!" she said to herself; which meant, "How glad I shall be when I have chosen between them all, and it is over!"

But a week passed, and the snow was gone,

and Kitty found herself in precisely the same position as she had done on New Year's day. She looked back upon that week with very little satisfaction. It might have been such a happy one; and what had it been, thanks to her own indecision? Every bit of bread had been turned into Dead Sea fruit, every drop of wine into gall. And why? Because she lacked courage to go and say to the man she had promised to marry—

I have been acting unfairly to you, to another, and to my myself. I was engaged to marry when your kind words came, and I had no courage to say so. Forgive me, and let me go.

Still less had she courage to go and say to Myra—

I am going to marry Dr. Norman—to give up gaieties and pleasures, and devote myself to his children. It is impossible that you and I can ever be such friends again as we have been.

A thousand times less could she write to Perry,—passionate, impulsive, true-hearted Perry,—

“I have made up my mind to break the word that I gave you years ago, not because I love anybody else, not because I do not love you, but because you are poor, and I prize wealth beyond affection.”

She could do neither of these things ; she could not endure the idea of making any one unhappy who was kind to her, and she knew well enough how unhappy the truth must make Perry, and how it must disconcert Dr. Norman.

Myra would not suffer in nearly the same degree ; but she would suffer from mingled feelings of disappointment and mortification, and would feel that she could never trust anybody again. Oh ! what chance of peace was hers with so many retributions hanging over her head ?

She was compelled to take one decisive step, however, which helped her to temporary peace. She could no longer keep Myra in ignorance as to her engagement. One morning, therefore, she set off in the snow, and found Myra eating her breakfast in her dressing-gown.

“Welcome, you little goose !” Myra cried, far too indolent to rise from her chair ; “don’t kiss

me—I'm eating honey—but sit down, and Tom-tom shall bring you some tea."

Kitty kissed her dearest friend in spite of the command, and before she took off her cloak or tasted her tea, broke out with an explosive:

"I have promised to marry Dr. Norman!"

Myra was one of those provoking persons who are never surprised at the right moment.

"I expected as much," she said, quite indifferently; "women can't help being fools, I suppose."

"You would think me a fool if I married him?" Kitty asked.

"That's quite out of the question. You can't do it, you mustn't do it, you won't do it."

"But I have promised."

"What could induce you to make such a promise? You are not a domestic person; the idea of having five step-children did not tempt you; Dr. Norman is not the man for a clever woman like you to fall in love with; his position is not worth the sacrifice."

"You amuse me immensely when you talk in that strain," Kitty said, laughing. "You forget that I am nobody."

“ You are a woman,” Myra answered.

“ Well !”

“ That is a very unnecessary ‘ well ;’ you must know that a woman who is young, and clever, and handsome, is a power in society.”

“ I don’t know that. It is not for either of those reasons that Dr. Norman likes me well enough to marry. It is because I am kind to the children, and a pleasant piece of furniture in the house. If I were a mean-looking little person with a snub nose, it would have been the same.”

“ Not quite, my dear Kitty ; you don’t at all know the proportionate value of things in the world. You think a great deal too much of the relative worth of money.”

“ I suppose all poor people do.”

“ But experience ought to make you wiser. Who is most admired and sought after when I have a house full of people—you or I ?”

“ Yourself, naturally.”

“ I may appear to be so ; but you have wit enough to see how much of this adoration is but skin-deep. Why,” and here Myra broke into a little laugh, “ you are like the rest of

the world; you would not take half so much pains to please me if it were not that I am rich."

"You are arguing on my side now," Kitty said, taking up Myra's little hand and pressing it, by way of deprecating the cutting speech.

"No, I am not. I want you to see the difference between the homage that falls to my share and the homage that falls to yours. People fawn upon me, and flatter me, and I don't always dislike it, but I would ten times rather be you. Everybody admires you, everybody adores you; and for these reasons: It is a pleasure to look at you, it is a pleasure to listen to you, it is a pleasure to be liked by you. Nobody cares for my company as much as they do for yours. Taking all this into consideration, you must be acting like a child to marry the first man who proposes to you. You should wait."

"I don't quite see the use of waiting. I have no godmother to make me her heir. I shall not grow more attractive as I grow older."

"Place yourself in my hands: I will use your brains, and you shall use my money."

"But, Myra, I have given my word, and

Dr. Norman really cares for me. What am I to do?"

"Tell the truth."

"Which? There are so many things I might say, and they are all true, but none the less unpleasant for him to hear."

"Say that if you marry him, you will be miserable—that is the simplest; then come to me, and see how happy we can make each other."

And Kitty listened and listened, assenting to everything; and finally went away, having promised Myra to break her promise to Dr. Norman.

CHAPTER XV.

THE DEPARTURE FROM SHELLEY HOUSE.

IT is astonishing how easily one finds excuses for putting off a disagreeable thing; and, though Kitty had left Myra with a firm determination to free herself at once, a day or two passed, and she was still the betrothed wife of Dr. Norman.

He noticed her troubled look affectionately, and would fain have had her more open with him; but she always put off his solicitude with a parrying smile. Sometimes, she had a headache; once, it was Prissy who had vexed her, or Wattie. She had no courage to hint at the truth.

Dr. Norman asked her point-blank one evening when she would marry him, thinking thus to bring matters to a climax. She blushed, looked

distressed, and had hardly a word to say.

“Do not hurry yourself in deciding,” he said, kindly. “For many reasons I could wish that the time should be soon, but I will wait as long as you like.”

“I wanted to ask you——”

Kitty began, then broke off, and looked down upon the carpet. Dr. Norman was silent, and she added, after awhile,—“To ask you for a little time.”

He looked pained.

“Are you not quite sure that you chose wisely for yourself in choosing me?” he said.

“Oh yes! it is not that; it is that I ought to have told you before, I had made promises to other people.”

“Not promises of marriage?” he said, smiling.

“I speak of promises made to Mrs. Wingfield,” Kitty answered; “she offered me a home with her so long ago, and now she seems to think that, in spite of my engagement, I ought to go.”

“For how long?”

Dr. Norman’s voice was bitter, and Kitty felt that kindness would have been less bearable just

then. Unconsciously, he seemed to be leading her into prevarications she had not dreamed of making. She caught eagerly at his last words.

“Would it vex you if I went—for a little time?”—thinking it would be so easy to write afterwards, and tell him the truth.

Dr. Norman did not soon recover from his surprise.

“It would not vex me half so much if you wanted to pay a visit elsewhere; but of course, if you wish it, I have nothing more to say.”

“It is not that I wish it, so much as Mrs. Wingfield——”

“In that case, do not go. What is Mrs. Wingfield to you?”

“She has been very kind to me——”

“That means—you have been very kind to her. I have often remonstrated with you for exerting yourself so unnecessarily on her behalf. She is good-natured, but selfish. I think her kindness to other people is generally so much capital very well invested.”

This was a very cutting speech for a man like Dr. Norman to make, and Kitty smarted under

it. Not knowing how to get out of her difficulty, she said :

“ I am afraid I must go. However selfish people are, one cannot treat them badly.”

“ If you really feel thus about the matter, it were better to go at once, but only for a short time. That is understood between us, is it not ? ”

“ You are very good to me; I wish I had been firm from the beginning, and then this would not have happened,” Kitty said; “ but perhaps it is better that I should go away for a little time. You will then be able to consider whether or no you have chosen wisely for yourself.”

“ Have we not both had time enough and to spare, to consider that ? ”

Thus driven into a corner, Kitty took refuge in plain speaking.

“ Sometimes—I know it is wrong and ungrateful of me—but I cannot help doubting,” she said.

Dr. Norman looked grave, and rose as if wishing to end the conversation.

“ Then by all means pay the proposed visit.

Give yourself time to think, and if—as I hope and trust—you will come back to me for once and for all, it shall not be my fault if you regret it."

He left her a little ceremoniously, and went away.

Kitty lost no time in making preparations for departure. When alone in her room she wore a brighter face. It would be a pleasant life at Mrs. Wingfield's, she thought, without children to amuse and look after all day long, with only one person instead of a dozen to please, with a carriage and men-servants at command, and an elegant drawing-room, and pleasant ladies paying morning visits.

The children had a thousand remarks to make at breakfast next morning. Dr. Norman quietly looked up from his plate, and asked Kitty if she were going that day. She sighed and said Yes, and then he opened his letters with rather a savage air. She could see that he loved her, that he trusted her, but that he was deeply hurt at her going. When Laura found herself with Kitty alone, she burst into tears, and, almost on her knees, entreated her to stay with them. The

child loved Kitty passionately, and clung to her in a passion of grief.

“It will be so miserable without you,” was all she could say for her tears. It was in such moments that Kitty Silver was unrivalled. A kiss from her lips, a touch of her hands, a whispered word of insinuating affection, and all Laura’s grief was gone. She was ready to let Kitty go that moment, and to love her all the better for trampling on her poor little heart.

“That is my sensible little Laura,” Kitty said; “and now you must do your best to make everybody gay and happy during my absence.”

“You will be back in a month?” pleaded Laura, her sweet eyes full of tears.

“What folly to talk of the time! Let us make it endurable, and then it will go all the quicker. Now, you must promise me three things. In the first place, never to distrust me under any circumstances; in the second, never to despise me; in the third, never to hate me.”

“Oh, Kitty!” Laura remonstrated.

“My dear, it is not impossible to distrust, despise, nay, hate, people one once looked upon as angels. You know circumstances force peo-

ple into doing what seem such strange things, and then they get blamed. How can I tell what I may be driven to do?"

Laura lay at Kitty's feet—a pretty heap of curling fair hair, pink complexion, and bright blue stuff.

"As if you would ever make people angry," she said, kissing the lissom white finger that played with her hair; "you might make them unhappy, but angry—never."

"Little flatterer, I am but mortal,—a little worse than other mortals, if anything; but now you shall hear how easy I could appear quite villainous. Supposing—we may as well suppose a strong case—supposing that I were never to marry your father at all!"

Laura, who had naturally welcomed the probability of a marriage between Dr. Norman and Kitty as the consummation of happiness, treated this speech as a cruel joke.

"You couldn't do that, and you wouldn't do it," she said.

Kitty urged the possibility of such conduct on her part.

"I could if I would, you know," she whisper-

ed, looking down upon Laura in her supreme, syren-like way. "Though Dr. Norman is your father, and so good, that everybody loves him, he is but a man, and we are women, you know."

And she turned her handsome head in a way that expressed some such sentiment as this:— Women, by virtue of sex, are such very superior creatures, and have a right to lord it over their slaves. It might have been an unwholesome lesson for a less gentle nature than Laura's.

"But why should you treat him badly, when you are so fond of him?"

"I don't want to treat him badly—I shouldn't do it willingly. I say, supposing that some very strong temptation should come in the way, and I—who am the weakest of weak creatures where my own will is concerned—should give way, would you hate, or pity me?"

"I don't know," Laura said; "I don't want to think of having to do either. I'm quite sure that, if you did worse things than disappoint papa, and all of us, I should go on loving you all the same, just because I couldn't help it."

"Which proves that you are a little goose,"

Kitty answered; "but, now, help me to pack, for Mrs. Wingfield begged that I would go in time for lunch."

Kitty's going was so sudden, that the whole family at Shelley House felt as if a tooth had been drawn. When Mrs. Wingfield's hated carriage drove up—for, good as were all the Normans, they could hate any one or anything that robbed them of Kitty—there was a universal feeling of consternation. The children cried; but that was only an outburst of passing grief; none of them said what was in each little heart—that she was doing an ungrateful thing.

Dr. Norman helped her courteously into the carriage, handed in her reticule, umbrella, and cloak, then pressed her hand as an ordinary well-wisher might have done, raising his hat ceremoniously as she drove off. What a forlorn house it seemed without her! Dr. Norman felt ashamed of himself for the accumulation of chagrin that he could not shake off. He would fain have shut up every recollection of her in the most secret recess of his mind till she was again by his side. He could not bear that his children and servants should see what he suffer-

ed, and made an errand to London, thereby hoping to bridge over the absence that he hoped, but did not feel quite sure, would end well.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN PARIS.

IT is spring-time in Paris,—the ever gay, ever gracious, ever youthful city. What a Barmecide's feast is always spread there for the hungry! How the merry tunes strike upon weary ears! How victoriously the carriage wheels of the rich dash along the streets, driving the meanly clad and the miserable into the gutters!

Kitty was one of the victorious ones now, and leaned back in Myra's carriage, as if soft cushions, obsequious lacqueys, and high-stepping bays had been every-day things with her, from her childhood upwards. It was quite wonderful how prosperity, in any shape, seemed to fit her like a glove. She grew plumper and prettier with every new phase of it, and sometimes look-

ed at herself in the glass, saying : "Can it be my old self, Kitty Silver, now so amiable and youthful, and pleasant to look at—my old, thin, soured, sharp-tongued self?"

Myra had come to Paris in a pet with some relations at home, and had skilfully managed to bring her new friend with her. The matter, as may be well imagined, had been one of great difficulty. For Dr. Norman had not readily yielded, either to Myra's obvious little by-play, nor to Kitty's apologetic and insinuating artifices. He was eventually worsted, of course ; what man is not worsted in a contest with women ? but he had not yielded with the best grace in the world. His disappointment had been bitter, and his anger quiet though deep. How it would all end, neither he nor Kitty could tell in their heart of hearts. They had hardly quarrelled ; they had certainly not parted with any understanding that the parting was to be more than temporary ; yet time, as it wore on, seemed to divide them more and more.

They wrote to each other still. It was so easy to write friendly letters, about the children, and old times and happy days that were to repeat

themselves by-and-by ; and, without touching on delicate ground, such letters seemed safe, and were perhaps consolatory.

Kitty blamed Myra for her own apparent short-comings ; it was always Myra, who would persist in keeping her away ; Myra, who wanted her all to herself. Myra was represented as the tempter and delinquent from the beginning to the end. And Dr. Norman tried to believe that it was so.

The life she was leading could hardly have been more pleasant. She was running the giddy round of vain delights all day long ; living in a world made up of Gounod's music, drives, dinners, fashionable talk, and everything else that was light, graceful, and sparkling.

How she loved it all ! the constant business of doing nothing, the interminable repetition of pleasure and fatigue, the long luxurious sleeps on lace-bordered pillows.

She was not, however, wholly free from disturbing retrospections and dreams. She could hardly forget the unshackled life in Fulham, the unvarying kindness of Shelley House, and the two men she had promised to marry. More-

over, she did not want to spend all her life with Myra, and was conscious of new ambitions, and new powers of attaining them.

She recalled her early life with alternate sighs of self-commiseration and complacency. In those times it had been a red-letter day, a shower of sugar plums, to walk to the theatre, sit in the pit, and return home in an omnibus. She had gone to some of the smaller theatres thus, and nothing could have been gayer. Occasionally, there had been amateur representations by Perry's friends, concluding with cheap, noisy, deliciously unwholesome little suppers behind the scenes.

The company had not been refined ; conversation was not strictly limited to such subjects as are discussed in a drawing-room ; manners had been a little free and easy ; yet Kitty owned to herself that she was not living amongst better people now. Those light-hearted, free-thinking, free-talking friends of Bohemia, had sadly neglected going to church, and many outward conventionalities ; but how full to overflowing were they of the charity that thinketh no evil, a thing Kitty now heard of every Sunday !

She marvelled how she could have existed so long in what now seemed to her a social heathendom. Kitty was learning new lessons in etiquette every day, and, it must be confessed, went through the task in a tractable spirit. She learned that it was disreputable to read a shabby novel with one's feet on the fender, to blacken one's fingers with roasting chestnuts, to walk out in wet weather, to eat penny ices—to do a hundred and one things as natural to one of her bringing up, as cracking nuts to young gorillas. She must neither eat, drink, laugh, nor talk in the old way, nor live to the old merry tune. Every act of daily life must now be set as it were to the slowest time, and such setting is not learned in a day.

Kitty proved an apt pupil, and soon became an adept in the art of treating people exactly according to their deserts—a very difficult art, by the way, and one only understood by those who dwell within the precincts of *Vanity Fair*.

Her little craft thus newly rigged, none gayer than Kitty as she set out alone on high seas. She feared neither shoals nor storms; how should she, having such infinite trust in

herself, who acted alike the part of pilot and steersman? She felt that she could afford to be gay, having hitherto waged successful war with the world—having proved herself in many a fight, a feminine Bayard, *sans peur et sans reproche*. What astonished her hourly and daily, was her own popularity. She was popular with all the world—with the young, with the old, with the beautiful, and with the ugly. How did this come to pass? She had no other allies, but a pair of eyes that looked wonderful things, and a sweet insinuating voice, and a ready wit. Thus armed, though obscure, she became sought after and feted wherever she went: though poor, she was made to feel rich: though virtually homeless and friendless, she had homes and friends without number.

If Kitty flattered and fawned a little upon those who were clad in purple and fine linen, was she not following the example of the world and all wise dogs, who wag their tails to those who have big bones to give away? Was she to blame because she picked her bone and was happy? It is not everybody's fortune to wag the tail to such advantage. And after all, does not

nineteenth century civilization set us bartering our goods and chattels, moral and material,* after the fashion of South Sea Islanders or King Theodore's subjects? How many of our friendships are wholly disinterested? How many of our hospitalities are as genuine as the desert fare of *cous-cous-sou*, and spring water offered by every Bedouin to the passer-by? He who pets his poor relation's dog, is almost as rare as a saint.

It is very easy to be good-tempered in Paris, and Myra and Kitty were yet in what may be termed the honeymoon state of friendship.

They seemed to have discovered a mine of comfort and delight in each other. If Myra was a host in herself, Kitty was a legion. They were continually making mutual discoveries, as pleasant as they were unexpected. Kitty had so much wit, Myra so much sensibility; Kitty was a genius, Myra a critic; and looking at the world through each other's eyes, they contrived to see a great deal.

They had plenty of friends, and visited or went sight-seeing every day. Kitty had learned to know Paris thoroughly in former days, and with her for cicerone, Myra found Paris a

wholly different and much more delightful place than formerly. A hundred harmless amusements were thought of that do not come in the way of ordinary pleasure-seekers.

Kitty was equally clever in picking out the plums of whatever social pudding came in the way ; she ignored dull people perfectly, and never lost sight of anyone who was pleasant or profitable.

They had a few French friends ; and, though neither Myra nor Kitty could speak good French, they were both delightful in French eyes, for they dressed unexceptionably—a crowning glory to Englishwomen!—kept up an elegant *ménage*, and were so gay, so charming, and so clever, as to place themselves above French compassion. Kitty had been originally engaged as Myra's confidential companion, at a salary of a hundred a year ; but how could such a contract exist between two friends who had become all in all to each other ? Things did not alter all at once, but Myra and Kitty both grew so sensitive where money was concerned, that the former state of things had become intolerable. Kitty, one of Myra's paid

servants!—Kitty's affectionate observances paid for by wages!—Kitty, Myra's dependant, who was so much her superior! It was not to be thought of.

So from Myra saying such things as these :

“ Oh ! Kitty, it is quite absurd to go on in this way—you know it is. If you won't consent to live with me, and share what I have as a sister might do, I'll run away from you.”

Or :

“ Why should we keep up such shams, Kitty ? I do not really pay you for what you do ; I could not, if I gave you all I had. You shall, at any rate, be my equal in such things as can be given away. You understand what I mean ?”

And Myra had said much tending to the same point, till Kitty gave way, and the two now lived together like sisters sharing the good things of fortune equally.

CHAPTER XVII.

HOW THE COMPACT WAS KEPT.

IT is very fashionable to be busy, and Miss Silver was now always too busy to see anyone but her dearest friends. As, however, very few people were ever sent away, her dearest friends must have been legion.

“Dites toujours que je ne vois personne,” she said again and again to her maid Françine, “mais vous pouvez admettre Tel et Tel tout le même.” The last clause, however, only applied to certain people whose name Françine knew by heart.

Mr. and Mrs. Nobody were sent away with no sort of ceremony. People worth knowing, that is, people with big purses, big names, or big anything, were admitted and announced with a flourish of trumpets. Poor little Françine,

who was a peasant girl from Normandy, adored 'Mademoiselle Silvare' as much as anybody, and adored everybody else for doing the same. She was not too simple to understand how matters stood. Madame Wingfield, with the rosy face and round eyes, and the dimpled hands that dropped their hold of everything, had the money, and Mademoiselle had the brains to make Madame's money worth having. Fran^cine, foolish little thing as she was, saw it all clearly enough, and envied Kitty's gifts, that made her so necessary to other people. All day long the same sum was going on : Mademoiselle's cleverness X Mademoiselle's power of fascination = Madame's livres sterling.

Kitty certainly initiated Myra into the art of leading a pleasant life; and did not Myra do well to be grateful? She had suffered terribly from *ennui* till Kitty's era, in spite of the natural advantages of independence, wealth, and position. Now she found every day delightful, every bit of bread sweet as a freshly-gathered nut. She had plenty of flattery, as much homage as she well knew what to do with, and only enough leisure to give zest to gaiety. Her

“At Homes,” were pronounced charming; her little dinners, perfect; her maid-servants, angels; her men-servants archangels; and the whole transformation was Kitty’s work!

How could Kitty be sufficiently extolled, petted, rewarded! Myra was by nature Kitty’s inferior, but she had it in her power to make her happy, which she did in her own lazy way. Kitty was told to get this and that luxury for herself, and she got it. Kitty was told to install herself in such and such a room, and she obeyed. Her room was the crowning glory of Kitty’s existence. Like all women, she loved pretty things; it was chiefly her craving for pretty things that had led her out of Bohemia; here she had them, enough and to spare. No “viscount’s daughter or earl’s heir” had softer carpets, easier arm-chairs, richer curtains, than she, in the fashionable hotel in which they were located. She had an elegant little piano, and took lessons in singing, practising the new operas out of music-books bound in white and gold. The last new drama of Emile Augier, the last new novel of Cherbuliez or

Octave Feuillet, the last number of the *Révue des Deux Mondes*, lay on her table, for she affected literary dilettanteism now, and could discuss any subject whatever, from Comtism to the Mexican Loan downwards, with piquancy if not with discrimination.

She was wonderful, this Kitty Silver ! and Monsieur D——, a Member of the Institute, who attended Madame Wingfield's At Homes, sat at her feet, and liked to hear her talk better than any of his associates. She was strong on politics too, and Myra was occasionally honoured by the visit of Monsieur le Comte de —— and Monsieur L——, both of whom were statesmen, but not too much lifted above ordinary mortals to appreciate the bright *persiflage* or downright practical wisdom of an English-woman, who always looked handsome, and was always dressed perfectly.

For dress is said to be the most important art in a woman's educational curriculum, and Kitty had mastered it thoroughly. She knew exactly where good taste ends and bad taste begins ; and it was no small credit to her that not even an envious tongue could find anything to

say against her milliner or herself. Such a triumph is not obtained without effort, and it may be safely affirmed that, what with the adornment of her outward, and the education of her inner woman, Kitty had not much time to spare.

Things which come naturally to other ladies had to be acquired by her, and she was ever on the alert lest she should be caught tripping. She was seldom caught tripping. Ah! she was wonderful!

All circumstances considered, it was no wonder that Myra and Kitty were both popular, and that their salon was filled with pleasant people whenever they chose to throw it open. It was curious that, though Kitty was the most admired, it was always Myra to whom men made proposals of marriage, and Myra's suitors would have become quite troublesome without Kitty to keep them off. It was so natural to Myra to find men pleasant when they paid court to her, and she seemed such a confiding little thing, that if Kitty had not acted the part of the Dragon, the golden apples would have been stolen by the first audacious adventurer.

Once Myra had said, after a long talk about lovers and affairs in general :

“I can’t make out how it is that you are not jealous, Kitty. I never had a friend who was not jealous before. I suppose it is because you have wit enough to see that people care for me because I am rich and stupid, and for you because you are clever and handsome. I wish I were you.”

“And I wish I were you,” said Kitty, caressing her patroness as if she were a child ; “I wish I were you.”

And she looked up fondly into her face as she spoke.

“Oh, you wouldn’t like it,” said Myra, gravely comic ; “you would find it dull. Just compare the abundance of things in your mind to the emptinesses of mine. You think more in five minutes than I do in a day.”

“I wish I didn’t think so much, sometimes,” Kitty said ; “but I suppose one can’t help it, Myra.”

“When two people live together, one of them must think, and thinking is hard work for wo-

men. Wouldn't it be better for us both if I were to marry? I don't wish to marry, I like my freedom so much, but marriage has advantages."

And Myra pursed her little mouth and looked contemplative.

Kitty looked contemplative too.

"There is time enough for that," she said; "we are so happy as we are!"

"We might go on being happy just the same," said Myra; "love for a man would never be much more to me than friendship for you. People scoff at women's friendships, but I am sure they are worth as much as anything else in the world."

"Then why marry at all?" said Kitty, looking up.

"Because," Myra said, "I think if you go on working so hard for me, I shall grow to be a bugbear to you in time, and that would be wretched."

"Never! never!" cried Kitty, emphatically, pressing her friend's hand. "Never!"

"It would not be your fault, but in the natur-

al course of things. No one's patience lasts for ever ; and, you know, things do bother you sometimes."

This was said in allusion to one or two bursts of vexation on Kitty's part, when people had been provoking, servants dilatory, dressmakers unpunctual, or Myra herself intractable in little things. Can we act the part of angels always ? Will any silken slipper cover the cloven foot ?

Kitty suffered patiently a reproach that she felt she did not deserve. From that time she carefully kept out of Myra's sight any stones that clogged the domestic wheels, whether little or large, and Myra said no more about marrying. It must be confessed that Kitty's part of the compact was by far the hardest to keep. Myra gave what had cost her nothing—rank, money, ease ; but Kitty gave time, thought, character, and capabilities, service of brain and lip without stint or spare.

One morning she was busily engaged in making a head-dress for Myra, when Françine came in, looking more puzzled than it was her wont to do ; for Françine's mistress was, algebraically speaking, an unknown quantity to her, and she

was constantly wishing that Kitty were less clever, or that she herself were less stupid.

For instance, there had come to-day to the door a little shy, ill-dressed girl, who wore a broad-brimmed straw-hat, and carried a cotton umbrella, asking in very broken French to see Mademoiselle Silver, her dearest friend.

Françine went with her story to Kitty, half crying with embarrassment, and Kitty had said, looking cross, but not unpleasant :

“ You little goose, Françine ! haven’t I told you a dozen times that my dearest friends never carry umbrellas—and cotton ones, too ! preposterous ! One of the dressmaker’s English girls, of course ; I can’t see her now.”

“ Mais non, Mademoiselle,” began Françine, “ elle vient d’arriver d’Angleterre, et s’appelle —s’appelle—mon Dieu, qu’est-ce que c’est que ce nom-là ! Ah ! Normand, c’est ça.”

Kitty suddenly seemed to see a hair on the carpet, and stooped to pick it up.

Laura in Paris ! She turned hot and cold, and sick with dismay. How could she see her ? How could she excuse herself from seeing her ? What could she say to her ?

She rose and went to the open window, feeling stifled. Hundreds of painful thoughts were rushing through her mind. If Laura were in Paris, surely Dr. Norman was in Paris too; and if Dr. Norman, Prissy and Wattie. What a scandal would be created by their downright homely ways! and Dr. Norman might perhaps press his suit upon her. How could she shield herself from his dreaded affection?

In this first moment of overwhelming agitation, it seemed possible to her to do a cowardly and heartless thing, namely, to deny herself to Laura, free herself—it is true, by a piece of falseness—from the slavery of sentiment to which she had so long subjected herself. But she paused before doing this thing, and the pause saved her.

“*Françine*,” she said sharply, “this demoiselle is English, and does not know *les convenances*. But how could you be so stupid as not to see by a glance that she was a lady? Admit her at once.”

And in another moment, Laura and Kitty were kissing each other, woman-wise, and Laura could do nothing but laugh and cry,

feeling herself in such an uncertain sort of Paradise.

“I never dreamed of seeing you,” Kitty said holding the child’s pink cheeks between her hands, and looking at her earnestly,—“you little, constant, foolish, impatient thing!”

“I thought I should never see you again,” Laura said shyly. “What a beautiful room this is, and how beautiful you are in your morning-gown!”

“And how pretty somebody else has grown! though just a little dishevelled, and crumpled, and bespattered at this present moment. Let us take off your hat and cloak, and smooth your hair, and settle you comfortably in this fauteuil. I keep it for my pets, and nobody else,” Kitty added sweetly.

“It seems a shame to put my long hair on these blue velvet cushions,” Laura said, looking at all Kitty’s elegant surroundings with a child’s wonder.

“Nonsense; what is upholstery for but to use?” answered Kitty, with the grand air of one who has just come into a fortune. “But now,

tell me news of you all. Is Dr. Norman in Paris?"

"Papa and Prissy and I came yesterday," began Laura.

"Without the boys?"

"Yes; Wattie is gone to school now."

"And how long do you stay?"

"I don't know, it depends——" Laura hesitated, lacking courage to add—"upon you."

"And where are you staying?"

Laura named a quiet, old-fashioned hotel in the Faubourg St. Germain, and mentioned that she had come to see her quite of her own accord, adding :

"Papa says he shall write to you."

"I am afraid that I shall have to appear very inhospitable," Kitty said; "but, of course, not being in my own house, I can't invite my friends as I should like to do; you shall invite me instead," she added, coaxingly; and, after some further talk, said, "But now I am afraid I must send you away, you dear, good little pet, and you must come some other time to see all my pretty things, for to-day I have many things to do for Mrs. Wingfield, and you would-

n't have me get scolded on your account, would you ?”

“ Nobody ever scolds you,” Laura said.

“ But see all those letters to answer, and she has friends coming to breakfast at twelve.”

“ And when will you come to see us ?”

“ As if I could tell you now, dear child ! But I will come, of course I will, and I am so pleased to see you again. Put this little box of bonbons in your pocket for Prissy,—and give my love to all,—I dare not keep you any longer, darling. Good-bye.”

Truth to say, Kitty had heard a ring at the outer door, and was anxious to get rid of one visitor before another should come. How could she tell who the next comers might be ? Perhaps some fashionable friends *en grande tenue* ; and what would they think of her little provincial Laura ?

CHAPTER XVIII.

SURPRISE UPON SURPRISE.

L AURA went away, smiling to herself for joy at having found her long-lost treasure, and much too happy and too dazzled by the brilliancy of Kitty's new position to anticipate possible disappointment for herself in the future. Greatly to her surprise, a friendly voice uttered her name, and a friendly hand was laid on her shoulder as she reached the threshold.

“ My stars, if it isn't little Laura Norman ! ”

“ Oh ! Mrs. Cornford, it's you ! ”

And Laura, like the loving little thing she was, kissed her old drawing-mistress warmly, and could not seem glad enough to see her again. It was so easy to Laura to love people when she felt happy,—and she felt quite happy just now.

“ Well,” said Mrs. Cornford, in that delightful unconsciousness of cotton gloves, be-painted gown, disreputable bonnet, and unkempt hair, that is second nature to your veritable Bohemian, “ so you have been paying court to our runaway daughter of Mammon, have you?”

“ Oh ! Mrs. Cornford !”

“ Oh, Miss Laura ! if you haven’t eyes in your head I have, and can tell a mountebank in a moment, though he has got on his plain clothes. Our good Kitty’s inner woman is like a mountebank, always dressed in plain clothes ; and so stupid are all of you that none but I have the sense to find it out.”

Had Laura’s old teacher struck her, she could hardly have felt more hurt or startled ; to her, Kitty’s self was sacred as the Commander of the Faithful to all true Mussulmen ; and being too simple to fathom Mrs. Cornford’s psychological subtleties, she could not bear her name to be unceremoniously used.

“ It’s of no use mincing matters, my dear,” Mrs. Cornford continued, with a friendly pat on the child’s shoulder. “ Kitty is a lover of Mammon, but it’s only the old birds who know how

people set traps, and when you have been caught once or twice you will be wiser. I suppose you are all here in a lump?"

"Yes; that is, papa and my little sister are here."

"We are staying in the Rue de Trévisé, numero quatre, but I am sure to be found in the Louvre almost every morning. Come and see me at which place you like best, my dear. On second thoughts, perhaps your papa might not like you to come to my quarters; but the Louvre is always respectable. You may paint with me sometimes, if you like." Then, with a hasty good-bye, they parted.

When Françine for a second time that day opened the door to a shabbily-dressed lady, who had evidently walked a long distance in the rain, her mind misgave her as to what she ought to do; but rough and ready speech carries almost as much weight with the uneducated as fine clothes and fine manners, and Mrs. Cornford spoke French roughly, but readily enough. Mrs. Cornford, moreover, was a large person; Françine was small, and Françine was awed. Mrs. Cornford was ushered in.

Kitty's little room was quite a picture of artistic finish and fancy, and the first thought that rose to Polly Cornford's mind was—the little artful creature ! who would have thought of her stealing all this taste from poor Perry and me ? Her quick, unforgetting artist's eye took in every element of harmony in a moment: the mellow tints of the wall, the bright, rich carpet, the sober use of colour everywhere, the taste displayed in every bit of furniture. Kitty had used every available means to make her room perfect, and what woman does not look twice as attractive in a beautiful room ? To Mrs. Cornford, Kitty looked metamorphosed, as she advanced, dressed in an elegant morning dress of rose colour, her hair smooth, her slippers of velvet.

But the vision of kind, slatternly, slangy, irrevocably Bohemian Polly Cornford came upon Kitty like a forgotten promise, or a bank failure, that makes one grow suddenly old and ugly. It is, however, against the laws of decent society that this sort of feeling should ever be expressed, and Kitty greeted her friend as if at that particular moment she thought her an angel.

“ My stars ! ” said Mrs. Cornford, going from one piece of furniture to the other, with her glass to her eye, as soon as the first words of greeting were over. “ My stars ! Kitty, in what coin do you pay for all this ? What a delicious colour your paper is, to be sure ! I’ll use it for my next background ; and what sweet little silly things in Sèvres on your cabinet ! and you’ve got one or two pictures too—a real Hamond, on my soul ! and the genuine Doré’s Don Quichotte ; and my ! what a jolly carpet ! ”

“ Algerian,” said Kitty, glad to find a topic ; “ isn’t it a lovely thing ? what reds, what greens, and what yellows ! and look at all the different patterns.”

“ I say, Kitty, is it your own, and will you lend it to me ? I’m painting a picture out of the ‘ Arabian Nights,’ and your carpet is just what I want.”

“ Of course,” Kitty said.

“ But I ought not to have asked you for the loan of it yet, for you mayn’t like to lend your carpets to me after I have said my say.”

Kitty winced, but would not let her wincing be palpable for worlds.

“As if anything you could say would make me disagreeable,” she said, sweetly; “but take off you cloak, and we will have up coffee, and we will talk over that.”

She rang the bell, and ordered Françine to bring up coffee and cakes, with less authority than usual. Poor Kitty! Mrs. Cornford’s visit was less bearable to her than a neuralgic attack.

“The chicks are here,” began Mrs. Cornford.

“Oh!” Kitty answered, smiling.

“And the Bianchis are here.”

“Oh!” Kitty said, still suave.

“And Perry is here.”

“Oh!” Kitty said, trying to smile, but groaning inwardly.

“And we are going to make a regular season in Paris, and stay I don’t know how long. Don’t say you are glad, Kitty; I know in your heart you are thinking what a horrid lump of us to be here, and wishing that we were all safe at home in Paradise Place.”

“How can you say such things! If they were true, I should be the most ungrateful wretch under the sun.”

“Everything is possible in this world,” said Mrs. Cornford, coolly, “and, if I must speak the plain truth, my dear, our faith in you is looking a little the worse for the wear.”

Kitty dropped into a chair, biting one of her long locks savagely, and sat still.

“I don’t say you are ungrateful,” Mrs. Cornford went on; “there is no sort of need for old friends to be grateful to one another.”

Here Kitty came to Mrs. Cornford’s side, and put her arms about her deprecatingly, and interposed :

“My dear Polly, how absurd to say that I have no need to be grateful to you!” adding with tears, and a fine, tremulous burst of passion, “you dear, good, ill-repaid, generous creature!”

“Pooh, pooh! I’m a hardworking, out-at-elbow, vulgar wretch, that’s what I am; and you’re quite a fashionable lady now, and wouldn’t come and call on me in my five-pair back in broad daylight, if it would save my heart from breaking. I know what saints you swear by, Kitty, and your creeds and catechisms too.”

“And what are they?” said Kitty, looking a

little pale, but resolutely determined to play the victim.

“I suppose your creed is,” began Mrs. Cornford, “to love your neighbour as yourself, if he’s rich, lives in a big house, and keeps a flunkey, and to fall down and worship one god only—Mammon the Mighty—and to him to sell your soul.”

“I don’t know why women should be so harshly judged,” Kitty said, penitently, but proudly: “a man gets commended for trying to better his condition; I have only done that.”

“You have only done that, I know; but there are more ways than one, Kitty, of making oneself smart at a fair; one’s fine clothes may be bought, borrowed, or stolen——”

“What do you mean?” asked Kitty.

“You have come mighty fine to the fair, Kitty, but I am much afraid you haven’t paid for all your gewgaws in good money that rings when you try it.”

“My dear Polly, how absurd you are!”

“Well, let us try your money. We’ll say you’ve paid so many smiles, and so many sweet speeches for this jolly little boudoir; will you swear them to be all true and genuine? Or, let

us take the carriage you drive in,—what does that cost you? Have you a regular tariff of prices, or do you bargain hap-hazard for all these good things? And truffles—I dare say you eat truffles now—do you buy them by the gross, for a few little flatteries of extra flavour?"

Kitty did not know whether to laugh or to cry, whether to take Mrs. Cornford's sarcasms seriously or in jest, whether to be indignant or humble.

She followed a middle course.

"Polly," she said, "if I did not love you, I verily believe I should forget all that I owed you in the old days, and be ready to hate you for saying such things of me now. But though I am foolish, and vain, and weak, I do love you—I do indeed love you, Polly, and you must not cast me off."

And saying this, she came close to Mrs. Cornford's side, and wound her arms round her neck, and kissed her on the cheek, knowing—who so well!—that Mrs. Cornford could no more resist her than all the rest of the world.

"You little, insinuating, artful, clever thing!"

Mrs. Cornford began ; but her mouth was stopped by Kitty's hand.

"No, I'm not insinuating, and I'm not artful," she said ; "I'm your dear, naughty prodigal, that's what I am ; and though you scold me to-day, you'll kill the fatted calf for me to-morrow —I know you will, you darling."

"Not I," said Mrs. Cornford, good-tempered in spite of herself ; "not I, Miss Kitty Silver. If you come, which I know you won't, I shall give you nothing but a brown crust, and lots of scolding. I live ever so high up in an attic, you know, in a dingy little street, and your love for me will hardly bring you there, I think."

"As if I should not come to see you," Kitty interposed, deeply hurt.

"Well, will you come in to-night ? Perry has asked a chum or two to dinner, and we are going to the Opéra Comique afterwards."

Kitty hesitated.

"I should like it dearly ; but Mrs Wingfield might object."

"Come on Sunday, then ; we'll go to Saint Cloud, and have dinner at such a snug little cabaret Perry knows of."

“We always go to church on Sundays,” Kitty said with some reluctance.

“Eh, go your ways, Kitty, to church and the devil!” Mrs. Cornford said, rising to go; “and don’t come to see me, till you turn poor and honest again,—which won’t be yet, I fancy.”

She put on her cloak, and would have gone away abruptly, but Kitty delayed her a little.

“I will come and see you, I will, I will,” she whispered; “give my dear love to Perry, and the children, and everybody, and say so.”

And she kissed her friend, and clung to her.

“I shall tell ‘em the truth, and nothing but the truth,” Mrs. Cornford said: “and when you see ‘em you can add as much to it as you like. I shall tell ‘em how I found you in a wonderful frock fit for a duchess, and a diamond ring on your finger, and a gold chain round your neck, and silk stockings on your feet. This is what I shall tell ‘em, Kitty, without adding or diminishing,—and so I promise you. We live in the Rue de Trévise, numero quatre. It’s a shabby place; don’t tell the grand folks if ever you come there. Good-bye!”

And with that Mrs. Cornford went, leaving
Kitty abashed, terrified, full of misgiving.

How should she shield herself from all the
new difficulties and perplexities looming in the
distance ?

She could not break from these old, true
friends ; but how to cleave to them, how to
be kind to them, without bitterest shame and
mortification ? Why—oh, why had they come
to disturb her peace ?

CHAPTER XIX.

CONFESSiON AND ABSOLUTION.

IF Laura's visit had been a thorn in Kitty's side, it may be imagined that Mrs. Cornford's was two thorns ; and they pricked mercilessly. All the pleasantness of this Parisian phase of life was gone, snuffed out in a moment like a wax light exposed to sudden blasts.

Kitty's gilded cage held an unhappy bird for a time ; poor bird ! that only asked less love and more oblivion at the hands of the world, and bewailed its unhappy fate with fallen crest, drooping pinions, and joyless eyes.

Whichever way she looked, she saw nothing but small ignoble perplexities. At present Myra knew almost nothing of what Kitty's early life had been ; why should she ever have

known but for these too fond, too faithful friends who would not be so kind as to forget her for a little while ? She should be sure to meet Perry,—dear, disreputable Perry,—in the first picture-gallery they might chance to visit, and should have to choose between the painful alternative of cutting him dead, or bringing a dreadful scandal upon herself; or she should be slowly driving by Myra's side, or, worse still, with some of Myra's friends, perhaps with fastidious Sir George Bartelotte and his daughter along the Boulevard, and come upon the old vagabondish, darling, but terribly unwelcome crew, drinking beer and playing dominoes outside some fourth-rate café. Kitty's heart sank within her as she forestalled the catastrophe of such a meeting. Mrs. Cornford would nod and put up her eye-glass to stare; Perry would look unmistakably aghast and forlorn; the children would turn scarlet with excitement, and gape and ejaculate, “There's Kitty! oh, goody, how smart she is!” How could she bear it ? How should she flee from it ?

She wondered how far it would be wise and safe to trust Myra; for trust her, in some de-

gree, she must, or break with her. There was no other course left open that she could see.

So, when Myra came in, a little curious, a little vexed, and half inclined to be out of temper with Kitty for having friends of whom she knew nothing, the little syren threw her arms about her more than a sister, and said plaintively :

“ Oh, Myra ! nothing could have happened so unfortunately for me. The Normans have come to Paris.”

“ What, in Heaven’s name, does that signify ? Dr. Norman knew your decision on a particular matter long ago.”

Seeing Kitty’s face cloud a little, she asked point-blank :

“ Isn’t it so ? If not, it was naughty behaviour on your part.”

“ I didn’t lead him on to hope, and I didn’t quite give him up. I can’t bring myself to blurt out unpleasant truths—for the life of me, I can’t. Don’t blame me, Myra,” poor Kitty pleaded ; “ it is my idiosyncrasy—not my fault.”

“ And it is my idiosyncrasy, not my fault, that I blurt out unpleasant truths always ; and,

pardon me, dearest, but though I love you, I can't trust you a bit—not a bit—if you have really acted towards Dr. Norman thus."

Kitty was supreme at acting little tragedies, and here was a great occasion. In a moment, she was at her friend's feet, a pale, dishevelled, penitent, distracted thing.

"Now, or never, you shall know all," she said, moistening Myra's hand with her tears; "and then you shall judge me according to my deserts. It is not only Dr. Norman whom my affection for you has led me to deceive, but there are others—one, a man whom I half promised to marry years ago—when I was very young: and they all love me so much, and want me so much, that they have followed me here; and now I shall have no peace."

"Well," Myra said, after the manner of a child lecturing her doll, "of course, it's you who have done the wrong, and who must suffer for it. If I could bear some of the blame, I would."

"Oh! you don't know half the misery of it yet," poor Kitty groaned, still in her penitential attitude. "My oldest friends, those who brought me up, and to whom I owed everything when a

child—though dear, generous, unselfish souls—are, or, rather, would seem to you, desperately vulgar—Heaven forgive me for saying so! I—I should be the most heartless wretch if I dreamed for a moment of giving them up; but I must choose between them and you."

And with that climax, she rose from her knees, and dashed to the window and back again, and stood by the mantelpiece, sobbing out:

"Between them and you—between them and you!"

"That is sheer nonsense," Myra said, with warmth. "Nothing shall induce me to give you up—till you marry; and I suppose you do not wish to marry this desperately vulgar lover who has followed you to Paris?" she said, archly.

"He is not vulgar, though I don't wish to marry him; it is of the others I speak."

"Oh! never mind the others. We can ask them to come one day by themselves, and show other innocuous civilities."

Kitty shook her head.

"We have been too intimate to come to that. Think for a moment! Can I just be civil to

those who have been as good as father and mother to me? I have told you, dear," and here her voice fell into a naturally subdued key "what a fatherless, motherless, forlorn, little gipsy I was,—and it was these people who took me in."

"Dear, dear," Myra said, "how I wish people would not be poor, and have children, and die: it bothers people's moral notions so. You can't cut your adopted fathers and mothers, and you can't be contented with being on mere friendly terms. And they are in Paris, and so are we. Dear, dear! what is to be done?—but don't cry, dear; that is no sort of use."

Thus admonished, Kitty dried her eyes and grew calm.

"It is such a comfort to me that we really care for each other," she said, "and that you judge me kindly in everything. Without that assurance, life were not worth having."

And then she seated herself on a low stool at her friend's knee, and told a long story, about herself, throwing such a halo of grace and pathos about it, that Myra quite envied the life at Paradise Place, and thought that Mrs.

Cornford and Papa Peter and Perry Neeve must be much more interesting than people of her own set.

“Would it not be possible for you to see them now and then without any break between anybody? They are so fond of you, that they would make any sacrifice, I should think,” she said.

“Oh! you don’t know what jealousy is in such a set,” Kitty exclaimed; “well-bred people are not supposed to have any passions,—at least, they keep them within proper bounds. I tell you there is no help for it but to leave Paris.”

“My poor Kitty! Leave Paris, when Paris is la crème de la crème of existence! Preposterous! You stay—I stay—they stay—poor things!”

“Impossible!”

“You and I, then?”

“Impossible!”

“But it seems worse than ridiculous that we should be driven from Paris, just because some people settle themselves here to whom you fancy yourself obligated.”

“As if I should dream of letting *you* make such a sacrifice for me!” Kitty said, brimful of grateful affection;—“that is out of the question. At the same time, I cannot support the idea of all the thousand and one vexations too sure to follow from the arrival of these—my dear, kind old friends. Oh dear! if one had no natural affection, how easy life would be!” and she looked very pathetic.

“Which means that you would ignore the existence of your vulgar friends?”

“Not vulgar—unconventional, I should have said.”

“Well, then; of your unconventional friends, and enjoy Paris to your heart’s content? I can read you.”

Kitty coloured, and was silent. Myra went on:

“But let us devise some means of cutting this Gordian knot. We will leave Paris as soon as possible, *c'est entendu*; meantime, do once and for all tell that cold, satirical Dr. Norman that you have given him up for ever and ever,” and here Myra looked up with arch insinuation. “Perhaps it may be as well to say the same

thing to the man you half promised to marry years and years ago."

"Oh, Myra!"

"You were more kind to him, were you, and sent him away sentenced and desponding, but not in suspense?"

Kitty now went on her knees afresh—we speak figuratively—kissing the ground, and sprinkling her head with ashes, crying, "Peccavi, peccavi!" and Myra, after an extravagant amount of childish scolding, coaxing, and caressing, left her in a comparatively happy mood. Myra consented, nay, proposed, that they should leave Paris in three weeks' time,—a great concession,—and Kitty felt that it would be possible to temporize with the Normans and the dear tiresome loving tribe from Paradise Place during that short space. She wanted to stave off a catastrophe till the eve of her departure with Myra from Paris, and then to go very meekly and penitently to the Faubourg St. Germain and the Rue de Trévise, and confess, as she had done to Myra—"Peccavi, peccavi!" and having received plenary absolution from all, depart in peace.

And all this while existence seemed a dreary isthmus to her, connecting the land of the past and the land of the future, across which she must walk alone. Strange, unaccountable human solitude, portion alike of the best and the worst, the meanest and the mightiest! Mothers have we, devoted to us; fathers who have toiled for us; brothers, sisters, friends; husbands, whose light of the eyes we are, wives who clave to us, children born of us, our very flesh and blood,—and yet who is not alone in his sorrow now and then? Do you suppose that the playful Horace any more than the serious Galileo, the saintly Washington any more than the sinful Phryne, was exempt from this inevitable heritage? Our bright brief glimpses of perfect happiness have been shared by those we would die for; but, God help us, each must go up to his Gethsemane alone!

To whom could Kitty lay bare her innocent heart? To none in the whole world, and sometimes, for she was without God in the world, the loneliness lay like a nightmare on her soul.

New ambitions were ever troubling her, as cutting teeth trouble children, and she could no

more have accounted for her discomfort than they can. Why was she always courting to-morrow and slighting to-day, as if the one were a poor relation, of whom nothing could be expected, and the other a rich one, having legacies to bestow?

She had made her little voyages hitherto under rare auspices, coming home with a fair wind and a good freight; why could she not rest in the snug harbour wherein she had anchored? Why could she not think excellent things of the world good enough, but she must hunger and thirst, and stretch out her hands after the very best? Why? "In the name of glory," Why?

CHAPTER XX.

PERRY'S REVENGES.

PERRY could not endure being unhappy. He regarded unhappiness as most people regard measles, or any other inconvenient disorder, and scolded it and reviled at it for coming upon him. What business had an unlucky fate to single him out, harmless, well-meaning as he was, and so kindly disposed to all the universe, that he would let himself be pestered to death by rats, mice, black-beetles, wasps, and other less bearable things, rather than end the most ephemeral existence on the face of the globe?

His was the sweetest temper by natural endowment; candid, ineffably artless, loving, unsuspecting of evil, true; but adverse fortune was to him as a sour-tempered nurse, and he and his nurse being at enmity, they buffeted and baited

and worried each other to the utmost of their power.

Kitty had a thousand ambitions ; Perry had but one, and not seeing any prospect of that one being fulfilled, he chose to take his revenge.

And how ?

Of what use was it to paint well since Kitty scorned him ? Of what use was it to eat, drink, sleep, and read newspapers, since Kitty did not love him ? Of what use was it to keep good company since he could not get into the best, namely, Kitty's ? Of what use was anything to him, good or bad ? Poor Perry set out as zealously on the road to ruin as Christian for the Celestial City of pure gold that stood upon a mighty hill, regarding those who tried to binder him or hold him back as his greatest enemies. He could no more help combining colours harmoniously, or informing his mosthasty sketches with passion and beauty, than he could help singing in tune, playing the lighter sort of music to perfection, or catching up snatches of any foreign tongue with delicious elocution. For your real genius is ever a Proteus, and Perry was a real genius : gifted with a won-

derful sense of beauty, and a capability for doing beautiful things no less wonderful.

You may be sure that Mrs. Cornford did not spare the rod of correction from the back of her Benjamin of adopted children, when she saw him persisting in this desperate behaviour. She had no longer the slightest hope of Kitty, and was too honest, and too fond of Perry, to lead him on to false hopes concerning her; but she tried to inspire him with other more reasonable ambitions, and to make him see the clay foot of the golden idol he adored.

“It’s more than silly, it’s craven, it’s unmanly,” she would say, “to stake your bread in this world and your salvation in the next—for I’m sure the idle won’t go to Heaven—on one die, and that die a woman! As if we were sent into this world like monkeys, to pounce upon the first nut we take a fancy to, and sit in the sun cracking it, and grinning and thinking ourselves wiser than King Solomon. I’m ashamed of you. I did think I could depend upon your acting like a man under misfortune—but men never do. The Lord only knows why such helpless things were created!”

Perry never grew angry, but would answer in a large sort of way, as if his trouble privileged him to say anything :

“Oh, Polly! do leave a poor wretch in peace. You know nothing about us. You don’t indeed.”

“I like to hear you say that! If ever a woman knew anything about men, I do,—to my cost, too. There was my father, poor dear, a good-natured creature as ever breathed, but with no more sense or principle than you could lay on a baby’s finger-nail. Didn’t he run through my poor mother’s little portion, and then betake himself to Australia, leaving us without a bed to lie on? There is my brother Tom. Didn’t we women starve and slave, and all but steal, to give him a bit of education and make a gentleman of him? And what does my gentleman do when he has got a snug clerkship and four hundred a-year, and not a child in the world—and our sister dies leaving three orphans? Why, he just invites us all to dinner on Christmas Day, and sends the chicks his wife’s old clothes, and thinks he has done his duty! And there was poor Cornford, bless him! I don’t

wish to say a word against the dead, but what a time of it I had with him! My dear Perry, don't say I know nothing about men."

"Oh! of course, you know just what experience teaches you," Perry rejoined sulkily; "a woman can't go beyond that. I don't expect you to have any sympathy with what I suffer."

"Twiddle-dum-dee," Mrs. Cornford said, with something like a tear in her eye. "If I didn't care for you, you might go downhill as fast as you like. But I want to rouse you to your duty."

"Good Heavens! where did you learn to talk like that?"

"It's everybody's duty to be respectable," Mrs. Cornford said, with vigour, "and it's nobody's duty to be an ass. Crying after Kitty is about as wise as crying for the moon, and crying because you can't get the moon of a piece with it,"—she added fiercely, "the life you pride yourself in leading now is a disgrace to the poor woman who bore you."

Perry turned exceedingly red.

“ Yes, sir, a disgrace. You spend your time in smoking and drinking, and bad company. You neglect your work, you leave a good subject in such a mess that no one can tell which is the top and which the bottom ; you disgust your best friends by debasing as delightful a genius as painter—I mean vagabond—was ever born with. A few months more of this sort of thing and Perugino Neeve’s name won’t be worth a farthing dip among connoisseurs and picture-buyers.”

Perry, at this, dashed about the room like one mad.

“ How can I work ?” he cried, “ when my mind is full of her ? She may be false—as you say—or true. What has that to do with the matter ? If a man loves a woman, he goes on loving her, and there is no help for it ; and I shall go on loving Kitty, and there is no help for that either —except absinthe.”

“ You—don’t—take—absinthe ?” faltered Mrs. Cornford, with sudden pallor, adding : “ if so, God save you, my poor Perry, for neither man nor woman can !”

“ How you jump at conclusions !” Perry went

on, still acting the lunatic to perfection. "Did I say that I drank absinthe, or that I was about to drink absinthe, or that I was about to be about drinking absinthe—pray, did I or did I not, my good Polly? But women haven't so much as a grain of logic in their compositions, and it is of little use talking."

Mrs. Cornford was not to be so put off.

"Dear Perry, good Perry," she said, laying her hands lovingly about his arm; "for the love of God, speak the truth. It is poison, you know, my dear, and I don't want to see you go down to your grave besotted with the worst drachm-drinking that ever was; you haven't—you won't, Perry, on your word, you haven't—you won't," and then she broke down, and began to cry.

Perry, being unused to see women in tears, and Mrs. Cornford's tears being wholly unprecedented, set to work to restore her after the most extravagant fashion. First and foremost, he darted to the door and called out, wildly:

"Tommie, Binnie, Mimi, make haste, my good

girls ! Your aunt is in a fit."

Then he rushed to and fro, overturning chairs, easels, and portfolios, in search of restoratives ; and finally seized hold of a tin can, full of paint-water, and soused poor Mrs. Cornford with it, ere she could defend herself. His act certainly attained its end, for Mrs. Cornford's tears ceased to flow, but she was roused to such a pitch of indignation, that she could find no vent in words.

What followed can be better imagined than described. Perry, seeing himself worsted in the encounter, made an ignominious retreat from the studio, and absinthe was not again mentioned for some time.

But Mrs. Cornford's anger was the thing of an hour, and when it had passed she was as keenly alive to the import of Perry's speech as ever.

She had known Perry since he was a curly-haired, marble-loving, apple-adoring little man of four years, and loved him with her whole heart. He had ever been what he now was, beautiful enough for a god, impulsive as a woman, naïve as a child, gifted exceedingly, pas-

sionate, sensitive, versatile, weak. And she knew that nothing would ever change him —except absinthe. How could she save him, her adopted boy, her fellow-student, her critic, her friend, her darling? How could she save him from this great predition?

Poor Polly Cornford was a bad hater, or she would have begun hating Kitty, though such a course were but to imitate the savages who buffet their unpropitious and faithless gods. From Kitty, she felt it was vain to hope anything. If Perry were saved, it must be by herself, unaided and alone.

In the weeks following, she watched Perry much as a cat watches a mouse; asking the why and the wherefore of any prolonged absence, searching his face with an eagerness at once fierce and pathetic, flying at him savagely when he made lame excuses for having come home in the small hours, coaxing him to his work as tenderly as a mother coaxes her sick baby to eat, exhausting all sisterly, womanly, motherly wiles on his behalf.

“Oh! of what use is it?” Perry would say.
“Let me go my ways.”

“That I never will, while my name is Polly Cornford, and I love chrome-yellow.”

“But it’s positively unchristian-like, and against the laws of society, to hunt a fellow down in the way you do.”

“May I have no worse sins to repent of on my dying bed!”

And the two would squabble over the contested right—like two dogs over a bone.

Mrs. Cornford resorted to other means, slyly persuading,—the artful loving, unselfish soul,—one of her patrons to give Perry an order instead of herself. What were her own interests in comparison with those of her darling?

“Of what use is it?” Perry said again, with what would have appeared brutal ingratitude in anybody else. “Don’t be so benevolent, Polly. “You only get hated for it. I shall paint this picture in my worst manner, of course, and whose fault will it be? You have been warned.”

What with Perry’s dogged persistence in his vagabondish self-immolation, and irritable depreciation against interference, it was a wonder that

Mrs. Cornford's patience held out. But her patience seemed to possess the quality of miraculous replenishment, like the widow's cruise of oil.

CHAPTER XXI.

KITTY FOLLOWS THE EXAMPLE OF THE PRODIGAL.

ALL this time Kitty was saying to herself that if there were no poor Perrys, and no widowed Dr. Normans in the world wanting to marry her, she could go her ways and be happy. She had passed the stages of early womanhood without being touched by the tenderness of a man—unless, perhaps, Perry's tenderness had touched her once or twice—and without desiring marriage for marriage sake.

But having in some inconsequent moment listened to the stories of two lovers, and never since having found courage to turn a deaf ear to either, she found herself now somewhat awkwardly entangled. In this, the Fates had been unkind to her, poor Kitty thought, for

what would have comforted her so much as coldness or forgetfulness on the part of these men? One sword of Damocles hanging over one's head is a trial of fortitude, but two are unbearable; and Kitty fretted herself almost into a fever with the desire of getting away, not from her enemies, but from her friends. Meantime, how was she to temporize with them during the two or three weeks that remained of her stay in Paris? To ignore the fact that the Normans and Perry's set were in Paris was impossible, but any safe mode of recognition seemed hard to hit upon.

Should she write?

Should she go?

Should she ask them to visit her?

She decided upon the first expedient, and one or two sweet little notes of excuse found their way to the quiet old-fashioned apartments in the Faubourg St. Germain, and the dingy little hole in the Rue de Trévise.

These sweet little notes were works of art in their way, and cost Kitty as much thought and time as would have sufficed for results much more important. But they answered her pur-

pose, and without affronting either, kept Dr. Norman and Perry away. It chanced, curiously enough, that she never once encountered her lover's face to face during this probationary period. It is true that she religiously abstained from the picture-galleries, from the theatres, drove in the Bois less than usual, and sacrificed herself a dozen times a day, Dr. Norman had called formally in the first instance, but she was not at home, not at home in the fact, and he had never repeated the visit.

Did Perry avoid her, and if so, was it for the sake of his peace or her own? She felt inquisitive on this point, though she would not have confessed as much for worlds, and the more so, as no answers had come to her sweet little notes to him, and Polly Cornford, and the Bianchis.

Myra, woman-like, tried to get at her dearest friend's real feelings on the subject of Perry, especially after having once caught a glimpse of him in the park of Vincennes. It had happened in this wise:

Myra and Kitty were sweeping their long silk skirts across the dewy ways one summer

morning, one or two friends bearing them company, when they came upon Perry, stretched, boy-like, under a tree. He was bareheaded, and, as the weather was warm, had divested himself of paletot, waistcoat, and neckcloth—like the careless vagabond he was—and with a little sunlight playing about his gold-brown locks and beard, and his ineffably winning face turned upwards, he looked beautiful enough to have Undines and Dryads for companions, in such a scene and such a time.

They would have passed him, but Myra felt her arm clutched as if in a vice. "Come this way," Kitty said calmly, though turning pale and red by turns. And they went the way she indicated, leaving Perry behind.

But Myra did not forget that glimpse of him, and would always be saying to Kitty such things as these:

"I don't believe there is another woman in the whole world, Kitty, who would have spent her youth with such a man, and let him love her and leave him and be happy."

Or:

"Of course I know you are fond of me, as fond,

I believe, as of any one in the world just now; but my turn will come to be forsaken like poor Mr. Perugino."

Or, worse still :

"I love you, Kitty, but I must say I think you have been heartless to that poor Perugino. Dr. Norman I have no sympathy with; he is hard, and dry, and, to my thinking, ugly; but I do wish we could contrive to make Mr. Neeve happy. Would you like me to order a picture of him?"

But Kitty negatived the idea of the picture, coldly, not seeing what good could result from bringing Myra and Perry *en rapport* with one another.

When not more than a week remained of their stay in Paris—the fact of their going was not to be told in Gath, nor proclaimed in Ascalon—she sent off the following promiscuous note addressed to Perry :

"DEAR PERRY, DEAR POLLY, AND ALL YOU DEAR THINGS,—I have been so hindered in coming to you, so terribly hindered, that I thought I should never get a holiday at all, but I have

an evening to myself at last—oh, joy!—and, of course, must spend it with you all. May I come to-morrow, at eight o'clock?

“Ever your runaway, repentant, affectionate (and, I know, forgiven!)

“KITTY.”

Then she wrote to her “good, kind friend,” Dr. Norman, saying how glad she was to hear that they were all well; how sorry she was not to be able to show them any hospitality, and begging permission to join their early dinner next day.

Of course both answers were *Come*; and the matter being settled, Kitty felt more easy in her mind than she had done for weeks past. Having determined that the sacrifice was to take place, she should deck herself, a second Iphigenia, very meekly with flowers, and yield herself up to the powers she had offended.

She provided a few propitiatory offerings, wonderful toys from the Passage Choiseul for Prissy, trinkets for the other ladies, a book for Dr. Norman, and an original pen-and-ink sketch, by a well-known artist, for Perry, that she knew

he would prize. She scribbled on the back of it, "For Perry, with Kitty's love." And she wrote on the fly-leaf of Dr. Norman's book, "Dr. Norman, with the affectionate and grateful regards of K. S."—thinking thus to put her two gifts on a proper footing.

Then she prepared herself.

She longed—oh! how she longed—to wear her jewels, but good feeling, good sense, expediency prevailed, and she put on an innocent-looking grey silk frock, and tied up her hair with a black ribbon, wishing she possessed moral courage enough to make herself hideous by some means or other.

If she had followed out her first impulse, she would have gone in a stately gown of ruby velvet, that made her look and feel quite queenly. It was a work of art in itself, and she knew how Perry would go into artistic raptures over it, and how Dr. Norman would smile with simple pleasure at seeing her look so beautiful. If there were two things under heaven for which Kitty would have sold her soul to Mephistopheles, they were velvet dresses and jewels; and it did seem hard that those she loved best

in the world should never see her “arrayed in all her glory.”

Why could they not love her in moderation, and be contented to have her among them now and then? Oh, weary, woeful waste of human love! she said to herself, and sighed—how easy life would be without it! Poor Kitty was a pagan as yet, unlearned in any kind of moral scripture, and she could not see what right human passion had to disturb the even balance of things.

When the temptations of ruby velvet, and pearl necklets, and gold earrings were put aside, she grew more cheerful, and made her adieu to Myra with a smile.

“Now, do be firm for once in your life, and give everybody to understand that this is ‘Miss Silver’s last—positively last—appearance on the stage,’ ” Myra said. “It is so unreasonable and undignified to be dilatory in love-affairs. If you really care—and I believe you do—for Mr. Perugino, by all means marry him, my darling. I would never cast you off for being true to him; and I would help you both, and give him orders for pictures.”

Myra sat in an easy chair, the very impersonation of pretty, petted, inconsequent, traditional womanhood,—womanhood asking no new privileges at the hand of progressive society, womanhood dear to the hearts of so many men.

Kitty looked down upon her from the height of cold, brilliant, calculating, intellectualism.

“ You soft-hearted baby !” she said, toying with her hair; “ what would the world be like if all women were Myras ?”

“ Like what it ought to be. Everybody should love somebody, and those who were rich should give half they had to those who were poor.”

“ As you do,” Kitty said, with a pretty show of humility. “ What a selfish wretch I am ! How can I be something lower in the scale of creation than a barnacle, and not die of shame ?”

“ A—what ?”

“ An ignoble animal that fastens itself upon some other animal, and there sticks and grows fat !” Kitty cried with fine disdain, adding, as she dropped at Myra’s feet, “ Spurn me from you as I deserve, and I should feel happier.”

"How beautifully you act!" Myra said; "you know you care for me, and I suppose barnacles have not particular affection for the creatures they stick to!"

"What a child you are!" cried Kitty, in an abandonment of rapture; adding gravely, "but you will never understand me—never!"

"Oh! I never shall; and I suppose nobody ever did, for that matter," Myra said. "You are more of a riddle to me than ever, to-day."

"Why?"

"Because you have all along declared to me that Dr. Norman and Mr. Perugino are nothing to you, and yet I know that you will come home from these visits without having made them a bit wiser than they were."

"They won't take the truth from me, the intractable creatures," Kitty said naïvely.

"Of course you must do as you like, but, you know, one cannot go on for ever shilly-shallying, either in small matters or great. Now go, you insinuating monkey, and get rid of all your lovers, and be home early. I shall be horribly dull."

Kitty went away leaving Myra in a reverie.

Myra worshipped her idol none the less for discovering that it had a clay foot. People took her for a very simple, unreflective little thing, but she had a subtle insight into character ; and all the time that Kitty's will moulded her as clay is moulded in the hands of the potter, she was admiring the potter's ingenuity, and wondering what the next form would be.

When two women enter into a co-partnership of friendship—one furnishing brains, the other wealth, as their joint stock-in-trade—it is highly desirable that the sleeping partner should not look into the other's books.

Myra was the sleeping partner in this Friendship Unlimited Liability Company—of course we speak figuratively—and would unwisely glance over accounts sometimes. She did not always feel that she had made a safe investment. She mistrusted Kitty a little now and then.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE FIRST FATTED CALF IS KILLED.

IT was a very pale Iphigenia who was led to the sacrificial altar. Kitty had set herself a harder task than she thought, and when the carriage stopped at the door of Dr. Norman's hotel, her heart was beating uneasily. All at once the old time at Shelley House came back to her; and what had happened since to make it so painful to recall? Nothing, of which she was not alone guilty; and she trembled at her own boldness in coming. Why, in heaven's name, had she come? would it not have been better to have appeared cold and cruel at first than have brought all this on us all? she thought, but it was too late to draw back now.

The hotel was one of those quiet old-fashioned

places that English travellers rarely patronise ; the suites of apartments were silent, sombre, and furnished after an aristocratic but somewhat uncomfortable fashion ; the waiters were unpolished, provincial-looking youths, who wore long brown-holland aprons with bibs, and the proprietress shelled all the green peas herself as she sat in her little office and carried on the business of the house.

At the merest finger-tap on the door, out flew Laura, all tears and kisses.

“Here she is, papa !” she cried ; “she is really, really here !”

Then she dragged Kitty into an inner room, where Dr. Norman sat reading the newspaper, with Prissy at his feet. The child had made a work-table of his knee, and stopped him from rising abruptly with a petulant :

“Papa, I *must* take off my doll’s work,” and she would have removed every shred and reel by turns if he had let her.

But he brushed the gay bundle into her lap, and came forward holding out both hands to Kitty with a shy, passionate, searching look.

Kitty hardly knew how to meet that gaze, but she made a great effort at self-control, and shook hands with him, looking up. They said a mere "How d'ye do?" then Prissy came up with her doll in her arm.

"Kiss me and kiss my doll," she said, very peremptorily, adding, "we have got such a grand dinner for you. I heard papa order it."

"But I didn't want a grand dinner, my child," Kitty interposed.

"Well, I did tell papa you didn't deserve it, because you were so long in coming," put in Prissy, archly. "When are you coming to stay altogether?"

"Prissy, it is not polite to ask such downright questions," said her father; "having got Miss Silver here, we must endeavour to make her visit pleasant."

There was something in Dr. Norman's manner that affected Kitty more than any demonstrativeness could have done; a studied deference, a studied kindness, a studied avoidance of painful things. Fool that I was to come! she kept saying to herself; a thousand times fool that I was to come! But having come, she could not

get away. It was very dreary. The place was dreary to begin with ; it had nothing of Parisian gaiety about it ; the little courtyard boasted a few oleanders in pots, but no one came in or out, excepting the primitive-looking youths in their holland pinafores. From the front windows the scene was hardly more inspiriting ; you saw a bookseller's shop and workmen in blue blouses, and workmen's wives in white caps passing by, and little else.

“Do you like being here ?” asked Kitty of Laura, who sat beside her holding her hand.

“Oh ! Laura is as happy as can be,” answered Dr. Norman ; “she has picked up her old drawing-mistress, who takes her into artists' studios, and all sorts of interesting places.”

“Mrs. Cornford is here, you know——” said Laura, colouring painfully.

“What do you say, Kitty, is Mrs. Cornford a proper chaperon for a young girl of Laura's age ?”

“Oh, papa !” cried Laura.

“Mrs. Cornford is a most warm-hearted, excellent person, but not quite a lady,” Kitty began, when dinner was announced, and Prissy

persisted in hurrying them away.

"I do so want to see what there is," she said.

Poor Kitty felt more dismayed than ever as dish after dish came up, garnished with flowers, Prissy whispering at her elbow :

"There are plenty more coming."

They had killed the fatted calf for her, and were eating it joyfully for her sake, whilst all the time she was sick at heart and ready to cry. To simple people like the Normans, the fare made part of the welcome, so that there was no element but that of kindness in this way of treating her. Poor Kitty made a superhuman effort, and was gay. She had become apt in the art of talking lately, and could say smart things upon almost every topic without apparent effort—a great accomplishment in promiscuous society. She could talk of Bonapartism, of the Crédit Mobilier, of the Eastern question, and had a string of pleasant piquant bits of feminine gossip at her tongue's end. She could make a pun of pure water, and was superb at repartee. What, indeed, could she not do ?

Dr. Norman listened and looked with a deeper

love and a deeper fear growing up in his heart.

The conversation continued quite general throughout the dinner ; and when it was over, Prissy brought out her doll's frock, begging Kitty to finish it. The child was the only person in the world who had patronised Kitty, and who, though in a measure fascinated by her, had never become her leal slave and admirer. But no one had ever made Prissy's doll look so beautiful as Kitty, and since she was there, and had been feasted, why should she not contribute to the general amusement ? So Kitty was made to stitch and stitch bits of coloured ribbon, Dr. Norman looking on.

“ When are you coming here with all your boxes ? ” asked Miss Prissy, looking hard at Kitty. “ To stay, I mean.”

“ I don't know, ” Kitty said. “ Give me the scissors, please.”

Prissy got up to fetch the scissors, and Laura forbore to look up. But Dr. Norman saw the expression of trouble that Prissy's speech called into Kitty's face.

“ We wish Kitty to do exactly what she

likes best, don't we, Prissy?" he said, with forced cheerfulness.

"Which do you think you shall like best, to come or to stay away?" Prissy asked.

"Prissy, didn't papa say you were not to ask questions," interposed Laura.

"Laura, you haven't got six dolls all wanting new frocks, or you'd be just as anxious as I am to know when Kitty is coming."

Just then the door opened, and one of the youths wearing bib aprons cried out :

"La voiture pour Mademoiselle."

Kitty's heart leaped. Was it possible that her time of probation had come to an end? She did not know how to feel grateful enough for Dr. Norman's forbearing conduct, whilst it puzzled her sorely. They had been under the same roof for two hours, and he had made no effort to get a *tête-à-tête*. It seemed incredible.

But Kitty's momentary self-congratulation was soon at an end; for Dr. Norman, with the quiet way in which he habitually did surprising things, said to the man :

"Renvoyez la voiture. Je vais conduire Mademoiselle à pieds."

When the door was shut, he turned to Kitty, smiling.

“I hope I have not done an unpardonable thing,” he said, “but I should so like to have a little talk with you, and if you are tired we can still take a fiacre.”

The thing was done after such simple, straightforward fashion that Kitty felt dumbfounded. Had his matter savoured one iota of lover-like arrogance or lover-like sentimentality, she would have made an effort at resistance. But this slight exercise of power touched, whilst it paralysed her. She felt as she might have done had he been an aggrieved father.

She smiled a faint smile, and merely said that she thought they had better go at once. The children brought her bonnet and shawl, and dressed her after their naturally loving way. Then she kissed them, promised to see them again soon, told them to open the packet she had left up-stairs, and descended with Dr. Norman.

“You had better take my arm,” he said, “or we shall never get on; the streets are so crowded.”

“Yes, it is just the time when the poor are coming home from work and the rich are going out on pleasure,” Kitty said. “What a pity it is that all the hard work of the world cannot be done by a superior race of animals, and not by men and women at all!”

“Then there would be no emulation, and that is wholesome food for a man’s moral appetite.”

“And no envy, which is more bitter than gall,” pursued Kitty, eagerly, for she wanted to keep up the discussion. “I wholly agree with Mr. Buckle’s theory about poverty, Dr. Norman, and—”

“We will talk of Mr. Buckle’s theory by-and-by,” Dr. Norman said, very quietly; “I want to hear about yourself first.”

“Oh! if you knew how I hate talking about myself. It makes me hate myself.”

“We must talk of things we hate sometimes,” persisted Dr. Norman, “and it is best to get it over. Are you really in earnest when you promise the children to see them again soon?”

“Of course,” said Kitty.

“And is your next visit to be a flying one also?”

“I hope not; but I am so little the mistress of my own time.”

“Are you really so tied and bound?”

“How can it be otherwise; I have so much strength and spirit to boast of, while Mrs. Wingfield is almost a helpless person.”

“Nay!” Dr. Norman exclaimed, impatiently; “don’t call her helpless when she is clever enough to keep any one like you about her. Call me helpless, if you like.”

“But you are not a woman.”

“Helplessness is not a question of sex, but of circumstances,” he replied; “any man with a family of young children and no woman for his friend, is utterly helpless. Life—that is the social part of it—becomes a chaos, and duty a maze.”

Kitty was silent. What, indeed, could she say?

“What will become of my little girls growing into womanhood without a mother? What will become of my boys when they go their own ways, and have no mother’s love to make them ashamed of sin? If one goes astray through fault of mine, what will become of me? Once,”

he said, and his voice changed to a softer key, "once somebody said to me that it should not be so."

"And it shall not," Kitty interrupted, eagerly; "whatever happens, I will be your children's dearest friend. I have their hearts still, and I will keep them."

"Are you quite sure you have their hearts still?" Dr. Norman said bitterly. "You forget that it is months since you left us, and that Laura has been growing older meanwhile. Oh! Kitty, it was a woeful day for me when you went away."

The pent-up storm had burst now, and there was no staying it.

Whilst he had kept to that aspect of her conduct which merely affected his children's welfare, she could listen calmly, for was she not receiving the just punishment of a broken contract? But when he touched upon their old relationship, as of man and woman loving each other, she would fain have rushed away.

"I could not tell what I should be led to do," she faltered, "and I am not happier for what I have done—indeed I am not."

“Then why not undo it? You must know, Kitty, that I ask you first to be my wife, and second, to be a mother to my children. I don’t think there is any use in repeating that old story.”

“I know too well that you love me,” Kitty said, sighing, “and I am sorry.”

“And I am sorry too,” Dr. Norman answered: “there is no one at all like you in the world, as far as I can discover, Kitty.”

After a while he added very sadly:

“And whom is it that you love better than me, then?”

Kitty turned an eager face to him.

“Before Heaven, none!” she whispered hurriedly. “You are the dearest friend I have in the world, but I am not the good woman you once thought me. I shrink from the responsibilities of being your wife.”

She added, with some reluctance, “I have so meshed and entangled myself with other duties, that I do not feel free to choose for myself. Had I been born a rich woman, I could have loved you and been happy; but as it is, poverty makes me

a slave, and I would rather serve a woman than a man."

"Oh! Kitty, that is a cruel jest. What gifts in my hands would have been comparable to yours? It is in the nature of things that a woman is a benefactor always."

They walked on for some time in dreary silence, Kitty momentarily expecting the storm of reproach she felt to have so richly deserved. But it was not in Dr. Norman's nature to reprove. If his children vexed or disobeyed him, he said so plainly, and there the matter ended. Kitty had hit him harder than she knew, and he was trying to tell her so in just and temperate words.

"I think," he said, "it will be wiser and kinder of you not to come among us again yet. At forty-five one does not cry away one's troubles as boys and girls do, and you are not the sort of woman any man would love by halves——"

"If only—" Kitty began falteringly.

"Why are you such a coward? There are no *ifs* in the case that I can see. You never cared for me, and that is the Alpha and Omega

of it; therefore let us shake hands and say good-bye, and God-speed to each other."

Kitty could not bear the quiet desolateness of his manner. Who so good, so kind, so worthy of affection as he?—and how had she repaid him for his goodness, and kindness, and affection? A tide of remorse and enthusiastic feeling filled her heart. She put her left hand on his arm, half smiling and half crying.

"If your prodigal ever comes back to you, will you take her in? There is nothing enduring in life but such a love as yours."

"Seven times and twice seven times I will take her in," he answered; and lifting the hand that lay on his arm, sealed his words with a shy kiss.

Kitty had never looked handsomer than she did now, with that fine passion of pity flushing her cheeks and softening her eyes; and Dr. Norman felt it some compensation to be so pitied. But what a short-lived one! They were already near the Rue de Trèvise, and he knew that when he should have left her at her friend's door, all would be over between them,—all

friendship, all sympathy, all the sweet observances born of love.

They shook hands silently; then went their own ways without looking back.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE SECOND FATTED CALF IS KILLED.

KILLING the fatted calf is doubtless pleasant entertainment enough to anybody concerned—except the calf, and the Prodigal. Whose heart does not glow, whose face does not shine, when he is called upon to say grace over such a feast? Ineffable moment! We have been wise all along, and can afford to relish the baked meats, and the text, and the application, whilst the foolish Prodigal sits by, head bent down, with little stomach for either. How could the Prodigal come back, I wonder?

The hotel in the Rue de Trévisé was one of those large dingy houses that are divided into dozens of small rooms let to poor students, milliners, mechanics, and occasionally to English travellers—artists for the most part—who,

like Mrs. Cornford and her party, catered for themselves. Kitty was told by the porteress to find *numero 64, au quinzième*, and she toiled up the dusky, dingy staircase, holding her lace-bordered handkerchief to her nostrils. She had been so accustomed to attar of roses and other fragrances of late, that the smoky, beery, garlicky air of the place seemed to stifle her. How could any one live in such a den? she thought, and she pitied herself for her former insensibility to refinement, more and more.

She stood still a moment or two before summoning courage to ring the bell. She knew that she must not here expect the reticence and the mercifulness she had received at the hands of Dr. Norman, and the skin of her conscience had grown more tender since she last lived among true-hearted, rough-mannered people like Mrs. Cornford. But she said to herself—I will be meek and amiable. I will bear patiently whatever may be said. If they act like lions, I will play the lamb; and with this determination she rang the bell.

“Bless me!” she heard Mrs. Cornford cry

within. "There's our fine lady. Run, Tommie" (as Miss Thomasine was always called), "and open the door. I can't leave the gridiron."

"Oh aunty ! I'm peeling onions," answered Tommie.

"Well then, you go, Mimi."

"Oh aunty!" cried Mimi, poor Polly Cornford's second darling, "I'm blacking Perry's boots, and am as black as a sweep."

"Send Binnie, then."

"Oh !" Miss Binnie answers, "how you talk, aunty. Don't you know you just gave me the jam-pot to scrape ? I'm as sticky as a treacle-tub."

"Oh, bother ! You children are always full of excuses," Mrs. Cornford said. "Then I'll go myself, though I'm in a worse pickle than any one of you."

And with that she opened the door, gridiron in hand.

"So you're really come, miladi ; that's an unexpected pleasure, as the spider said to the fly. I know you look upon us as the dirtiest, degradedest set in the world. But come in, my

dear, and lend us a helping hand with the supper."

The three girls now came up and embraced Kitty and hung about her, loving and slatternly and loquacious.

"Perry is in his room, higher up, putting on his best clothes, and aunty told him he was a fool for his pains," began Tommie.

"And the Bianchis are coming, and Monsieur Puig (we call him Piggy behind the scenes), who is engaged to Vittoria Bianchi, and who writes such beautiful stories for *Le Petit Journal*," added Mimi.

"And aunty says you're not to go home till daylight, till daylight doth appear," said Binny, the youngest of the three girls, a sprite of ten, "and that when you are gone, Perry will kill himself with charcoal. Will you let him?"

"Let me take off my bonnet and shawl, and then I will answer your questions," Kitty said.

"My stars! what a bonnet!" said Mrs. Cornford, looking over her shoulder from the gridiron, "if you take my advice, Kitty, you'll keep it on, for there isn't any room for it here,

small as it is. You see, we have to turn the studio into a kitchen, and the bedroom into a drawing-room, when we have grand visitors, like you."

"Shall I carry it up into Perry's studio?" asked Mimi.

"Well, on the tip of the toasting-fork, then, for your hands are not clean enough to touch it," said Mrs. Cornford, but Kitty suggested that the lay-figure was quite as convenient, and there the matter ended.

"Anyhow, you might as well run and tell Perry that Kitty is here, for they could be having a little talk in the drawing-room together, before the people come," Mrs. Cornford added, and Kitty had much ado to hinder the messenger from being sent.

"There is so much to do, and he'd only be in the way," she said, beginning to dust and brush, and pretend to be busy.

Mrs. Cornford and the children kept up a ceaseless talk, part banter, part catechism, but poor Kitty was thinking all the while of Perry. What would he say to her? How would he greet her? It had been painful enough to re-

ceive Dr. Norman's quiet stabs, but he was so merciful, so careful not to repeat the wound, that she felt she could bear almost as much again. From Perry, who was young, and had moreover all the fire and impatience of genius, what might she not expect? Kitty had no idea of religion, as we have said, but even the children of Mammon are consciences at times that life and the handling of it are solemn things. Kitty handled her life as best pleased her, and was only troubled with tremblings now and then. There was one power to which she bowed a submissive neck, the power of Anger, just whose parent is Love. Whose love might so engender anger as Perry's? and he had all his life before him! It was his youth that troubled her like a bad dream—his gifted, beautiful youth, that might otherwise have been so happy.

By-and-by, there was a loud ring at the bell.

“Perry, I'll be bound!” cried Mrs. Cornford. “It's only young harum-scarums, like your lover—oh, Kitty! you needn't look alarmed—who ring bells in that way? Kitty, my good girl, do open the door.”

Kitty, obeying mechanically, let Perry in.

He looked much the same Perry as ever—a little paler, a little thinner, perhaps, but no less youthful, and no less winning. What eyes, what a mouth, what locks were his! There was no other man in all the world at all like him, Kitty felt, yet she could not find it in her heart to give up the game of life, and live in his love.

He crimsoned to the roots of his hair, then turned very white, and had never a word to say: Kitty's tongue also clave to the roof of her mouth. At last, for the little girls were all looking on, round-eyed and full of curiosity, he stammered:

“Oh, Kitty, we are going to be so gay to-night! I have learned a new song to sing since last we feasted together.”

“Sing it now, do!” cried little Binnie.

“Supper first, and songs afterwards,” Perry said, still reckless, and speaking with artificial gaiety. “Suppose, Kitty, you and I lay the cloth as we used to do? One can’t so well be idle and merry.”

The second little room, dignified by the name of a salon, opened out of the first, and here the

fatted calf was to be served. The children ran hither and thither, fetching knives, forks, and napkins, whilst Perry and Kitty arranged the table. Perry had truly said, one can't be idle and merry. Kitty felt that if she were left to herself for a single minute, she should cry.

“How natural it all seems,” he said ; “but you have forgotten how to fold the napkins in the true *Chapeau de Bonaparte* style. I suppose your funkeys do it now.”

“Oh ! let us forget the funkeys,” began Kitty.

“Very well, for the time being we will pretend, as children say, that everything is just as it was. We’re in Paradise Place ; you’re Kitty and I’m Perry again, and we’re going to be married some day. My dear, mind what you are about ; you are spilling the salt in a most reckless manner.”

Her hands were shaking so that she could hardly hold anything, and he saw it. He grew gayer and gayer.

“I’m really painting good things now,” he went on. “I have, in fact, turned the corner, and don’t think I shall ever be compelled to

mortgage my dress-suit and Sunday hat again. Isn't that a wonderful improvement in my circumstances? And just look here."

He drew out of his pocket a little bundle of notes for twenty, forty, and a hundred francs.

"Take care of them for me, Kitty. That was our bargain, you know; I was to earn the money, and you were to spend it."

"My pocket is not very safe," hesitated Kitty.

"Nonsense, we are only in play," he said, and put them in his pocket. "Well, I've more good news to tell you; I no longer go about in the world labelled 'SOLD TO A DEALER,' but are free to carry my sacks of corn to whatever market I like; and though markets are down, I can make my price."

"I am so glad!"

"Oh, it's jolly! I may well sing songs; you remember the tide-mark you set up last year: we shall soon reach it, and then, why then, what Darby or Joan will there be left in the world to envy? I think we agreed that we could live in harmony on six hundred a year?"

"I think we did," answered Kitty, feeling cold and sick.

“Bien! I am at work on a picture, a commission, that will bring me two-thirds of that sum; a couple of pot-boilers, turned off in a fortnight will make it up—and what can you say, what can you say, Kitty?”

“Nothing,” faltered Kitty.

“Of course not; but will set to work on your wedding clothes, like the sweet girl you are. See! I have already bought the wedding-ring.” And he drew from his waistcoat pocket a wedding-ring.

“Try it on,” he added

Kitty made a faint resistance, but in vain, and was constrained to try on the wedding-ring. All her powers of self-composure and self-mastery seemed to have forsaken her. She tried again and again to rally them, but failed. The ghastly game must be played out at Perry’s will.

“It fits exactly; so that point is settled,” he continued. “And now we come to another equally so. Don’t you think the 25th of June is auspicious for a wedding-day?”

“You are too absurd,” Kitty faltered.

“We are only in play, and it does not matter

being absurd. Will the 25th of June do, Kitty? We are in the first days of May, so it is not hurrying you much; and," he added, with a look of love and wistfulness not to be put into any words, "I am so tired of waiting."

Kitty had her back turned upon the busy little party in the kitchen, and standing thus, covered her eyes with her hands, and groaned to herself. Did she indeed love Perry a little then? Was she touched by the way in which he sported with his sorrow, making it all the more apparent? Would she fain have undone the work of her hands, pulled up the fatal harvests of her sowing?

She could not have answered these questions. He was unhappy, his unhappiness spoiled the flavour of her existence; she wanted him to leave her, and become happy somehow. That was all.

The secret, stealthy groan relieved her. She felt better able to comfort his eerie mood.

"And so am I tired of waiting," she said.

He turned upon her suddenly, cold as ice.

"For me?" he asked.

"No; for no human being—for rest, for rest

as perfect as one gets when dead. Life is like a fair, and there are so many things we want to buy with our little stock of money. I may lay mine out foolishly, but I suppose so does everybody."

"You don't lay yours out half so foolishly as I do," Perry said bitterly. Then he fell back into his ghastly mood; and, whilst decking the table with flowers, laughed, talked, and sang after such frantic fashion, that a stranger coming in must have taken him for a runaway Bedlamite.

"Why, it's not a year since we died and were buried, and now we are all brought to life again. How jolly!" he cried. "I died soon after that farewell feast to you, Kitty, in Paradise Place; when did you die? Here we are, all safe and sound again, so don't look glum, except that we have left something behind us. Have I really a head on my shoulders, Kitty—have I? Don't laugh, Mademoiselle Mimi, people have done more comical things than lay a cloth without having heads on their shoulders before. I'll sing you a song of Heine's, to prove my assertion true. It is about Marie Antoinette and her

maids of honour, long after they were guillotined (here a snatch of the ballad) ; there is to be a levée, you know (here another snatch), and they are dressing the queen now (here another snatch). Oh, it's so queer ! They put on her majesty's clothes all right : of course they don't friz her, because she's no head, poor thing ! as Heine says—

‘ Das sind die Folgen der Revolution
Und ihre fatalen Doctrine.
An Allem ist schuld Jean Jaques Rousseau,
Voltaire und die Guillotine.’

And the sun was so scared when he peeped into the Tuileries' windows, that he went to bed for the rest of the day. That's my glorious Heine all over. Now doesn't the theme apply to ourselves ? Here we are, all assembled to make merry, but I'm sure, for my part, I would ten times rather have stayed in my grave where I was—I mean where I should like to be——”

“ Perry l” put in Kitty, quite shocked.

“ My liege lady and mistress, I listen and obey. Have I not always obeyed you ? You told me to work hard and save money ; have I not done it ? Ask my worthy friend Mrs. Cornford ; ask

the ghost of my mother's grandfather ; ask the shades of my immortal namesake, Pietro Vanucci Perugino."

To Kitty's great relief she heard the bell ring. It was Monsieur Puig who entered the room, hat in hand, got up as to externals in a way that did credit to the *Petit Journal*. It is quite wonderful what a Bohemian *pur et simple* can make of himself in Protean Paris. He can write, palimpsest-wise, the shibboleths of respectable society, over the veriest rag-tag-and-bob-tail substratum. He can be gloved, perfumed and Puritanic on the shortest notice. He can swear by Paul de Kock, and all the Bohemian powers that be, one moment, and the next affect the profoundest adoration of Emile Souvestre and the author of "The Heir of Redclyffe." Monsieur Puig, having engaged himself to an English demoiselle, felt bound to be unexceptionable in her society ; and he was so often in her society, that he was insensibly casting his Bohemian skin. Upon this occasion, when Perry formally introduced Kitty as his fiancée—whispering to Kitty "It is only in jest, you know,"—he fell straight-way head over ears in love with the tall, hand-

some, piquant-looking girl in Quakerish grey silk, wishing he had two selves to give away ; it seemed too little happiness to marry and become respectable but once in one's life !

“ I suppose Vittoria will make her appearance by-and-by,” said Mrs. Cornford, bluntly ; “ but it is hard work for photographers to clean themselves.”

“ But how lovely is that stain of chloride of silver upon her dear little fingers !” cried Monsieur Puig, rapturously. “ It's like the henna with which Moorish ladies love to adorn themselves. *Ah ! la voilà, mon ange !*” and he sprang forward to greet his betrothed.

The photographers were angular, plaintive-looking little women, with large bright eyes, sallow complexions, unhandsome features, and sweet voices. They were both gifted with genius—a puzzling, half proud, half painful gift to women—and were more wise than merry, and more witty than coquettish.

Who can for an instant aver that genius unsexes a woman ? None who know what genius and women really are. Vittoria Bianchi, with a very little more education, could have taught

the world æsthetics, either by work or writing, like a first-rate man. Because she possessed a superabundance of intellect, and a hunger and thirst after knowledge, did she blush and tremble the less when her lover's looks praised her? Not she. He was a very ordinary man indeed; but he loved her, and that was enough. Is not a man's love enough for any woman?

Two or three other men arrived; one an artist, another an author, a third a violinist; all three shabby, sociable, delightfully sympathetic creatures, who had been reserving alike appetite and powers of entertainment for the occasion.

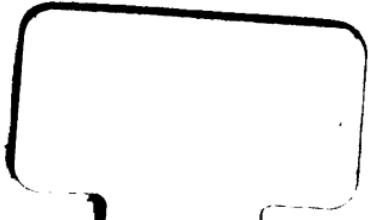
Supper being announced by one of Mrs. Cornford's models, who had come in to assist, the little party sat down.

Kitty fell into a trance. She heard Perry's voice at her elbow calling her by well-remembered names; she saw the old familiar faces around her; she was called back to the old familiar life by every word and jest. It was all very strange, and she longed to break the spell and breathe freely again.

Perry was mirthful as a harlequin, and pale as a ghost.

“You don’t eat, you don’t drink, Kitty,” he kept saying to her; “and you are so grave. Can’t you make merry with me for a little while?”

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.



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